# DIRECT INVESTIGATION REPORT

# EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTEGRATED CALL CENTRE IN HANDLING COMPLAINTS

June 2008

Office of The Ombudsman

Hong Kong

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*LEGEND OF ABBREVIATIONS*

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# 直接調查報告摘要
# 綜合電話查詢中心處理投訴的成效

## 背景資料

綜合電話查詢中心（「查詢中心」）於二零零一年七月成立，由效率促進組管理及監督，旨在提供單一聯絡點，讓市民可以就參與查詢中心服務的政府部門的服務提出查詢、投訴及建議。查詢中心每天二十四小時運作，其最終目標，是以「1823 政府熱線」取代現時各部門繁多的電話熱線、傳真號碼及電郵地址。

2. 自本署於二零零三年就查詢中心的整體運作進行直接調查後，查詢中心承擔了新的職能，並把服務範圍擴大至覆蓋 20 個政府部門，共 104 條電話熱線、傳真號碼及電郵地址（參見**附錄**）。但同時，申訴專員仍不斷接到投訴，指查詢中心的服務欠佳，尤其是在處理投訴方面。很多時候，縱使查詢中心接聽電話的職員有遵從相關規則和程序辦事，但市民依然提出投訴。

## 調查工作

3. 這些投訴意味着查詢中心的整體安排，以及行政體制有欠妥善的情況持續，或出現新的問題。有鑑於此，申訴專員於二零零七年六月二十日宣布，根據《申訴專員條例》（第 397 章）第 7(1)(a)(ii)條主動展開直接調查，以審研：

(a) 查詢中心在處理市民投訴[1]上所擔當的角色；

(b) 查詢中心就下列各項所訂定的工作程序和實施情況—

[1] *除非特別指明，否則「投訴」均指市民就政府部門提供的公共服務所作出的投訴。*

(i) 轉介投訴予負責的政府部門；

(ii) 協調及監察有關部門對投訴的回應；

(iii) 跟進工作，尤其是當問題涉及多個部門時；

(iv) 在跟進期間向投訴人報告個案進度；以及

(v) 給予投訴人最後回覆；

(c) 查詢中心現時的運作模式是否適切有效；以及

(d) 如有需要，應如何作出改善。

4. 本署人員曾到訪查詢中心，與效率促進組及中心的工作人員及高級管理層會面。我們亦審研了逾100宗投訴個案，並審閱查詢中心和參與部門簽訂的合約、工作手冊，統計資料及工作檔案。

**服務範圍**

5. 查詢中心的服務範圍覆蓋某些（而非全部）與香港民生有關的層面。現時，有十個參與部門的工作與環境及衛生清潔問題有直接關連，而這兩方面正是效率促進組設立查詢中心初期的目標範圍。此外，該中心亦會因應需要為其他部門提供服務（參見**第25段**之熱門課題例子）。

6. 二零零七年，99%查詢是以電話提出；而投訴則為90%。查詢中心現時處理兩類來電：(a)直接致電1823熱線的電話；以及(b)致電參與部門熱線號碼的電話。雖然查詢中心最初是希望以1823熱線取代部門熱線，但部門熱線與1823現時仍然同時存在。

7. 除接聽來電外，查詢中心亦為五個部門處理電郵，以及為兩個部門處理傳真。此外，中心又為三個部門維持一個中央投訴儲存庫，保存透過所有方式接到的投訴記錄（參見**附錄**）。

*表1. 參與部門及查詢中心的服務範圍：*

| | 部門 | 電話熱線 | 電郵 | 傳真 | 中央投訴儲存庫 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 漁農自然護理署 | • | | | |
| 2. | 建築署 | • | | | |
| 3. | 屋宇署 | • | | | |
| 4. | 土木工程拓展署 | • | | | |
| 5. | 公司註冊處 | • | | | |
| 6. | 渠務署 | • | | | |
| 7. | 機電工程署 | • | | | |
| 8. | 食物環境衞生署 | • | • | | |
| 9. | 路政署 | • | • | • | • |
| 10. | 康樂及文化事務署 | • | • | | • |
| 11. | 勞工處 | • | | | |
| 12. | 土地註冊處 | • | | | |
| 13. | 海事處 | • | | | |
| 14. | 政府資訊科技總監辦公室 | • | • | | |
| 15. | 郵政署 | • | | | |
| 16. | 差餉物業估價署 | • | | | |
| 17. | 學生資助辦事處 | • | | | |
| 18. | 社會福利署 | • | | | |
| 19. | 衞生署控煙辦公室 | • | | | |
| 20. | 運輸署 | • | • | • | • |

**統計數字**

8. 查詢中心把接到的通信分為四類：查詢[2]、投訴[3]、建議[4]及讚賞。投訴佔中心接到的個案總數約十分之一。

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[2] *「查詢」是指市民只想取得資料。*

[3] *「投訴」是指市民對政府提供的某些服務感到不滿，期望部門採取補救措施並作出回覆。*

[4] *「建議」是指市民對政府提供的某些服務感到不滿，期望部門採取補救措施，但沒有要求部門回覆。*

9. 二零零四年至二零零七年期間，透過 1823 熱線提出的投訴，比例大致不變，約佔每年投訴總數的三分之一（參見**表 2**）。相反地，透過 1823 熱線提出的查詢的比例，則由二零零四年的五分之一增至二零零七年的三分之一。

*表 2. 查詢中心接聽來電的分類及個案種類的每月平均數字*

| 個案種類 | 使用熱線 | 2004 年 (佔總數百分比) | 2005 年 (佔總數百分比) | 2006 年 (佔總數百分比) | 2007 年 (佔總數百分比) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **投訴** | **1823** | 4,238 (4%) | 6,625 (4%) | 6,795 (3%) | 7,647 (3%) |
| | **部門熱線** | 9,946 (8%) | 8,431 (5%) | 11,191 (5%) | 12,477 (6%) |
| | **比例 (1823：投訴總數)** | 1 : 3 | 1 : 2.3 | 1 : 2.6 | 1 : 2.6 |
| **查詢** | **1823** | 20,067 (17%) | 33,414 (18%) | 61,939 (28%) | 77,072 (33%) |
| | **部門熱線** | 78,659 (67%) | 128,617 (71%) | 134,329 (61%) | 125,749 (54%) |
| | **比例 (1823：查詢總數)** | 1 : 4.9 | 1 : 4.8 | 1 : 3.2 | 1 : 2.6 |
| **其他** | **1823** | 2,127 (2%) | 2,718 (1%) | 4,352 (2%) | 4,874 (2%) |
| | **部門熱線** | 2,969 (2%) | 2,724 (1%) | 2,508 (1%) | 3,378 (2%) |
| **個案總數** | | **118,006 (100%)** | **182,529 (100%)** | **221,114 (100%)** | **231,197 (100%)** |

*（註：「其他」包括讚賞、建議、滋擾來電、撥錯號碼及試驗來電。查詢中心沒有為這類來電另行保留統計資料）*

*資料來源：效率促進組*

**對查詢中心服務的需求**

10. 市民對查詢中心服務的需求，由二零零四年的 180 萬次大幅增加至二零零七年的 310 萬次。

11. 雖然效率促進組嘗試增加查詢中心的人手，並推行新措施（如編訂多個技能組別，探索新科技，甚至把服務外判等）以應付對其服

務需求的增加，但人手緊絀等問題始終令人憂慮。效率促進組估計，於二零零八年內，查詢中心的工作量將達到飽和，每月平均接聽 23 萬個來電，同時仍能全面履行服務承諾。

12. 查詢中心於二零零七年拒絕了六個部門加入的申請，而有些已參與的部門（如郵政署）則曾經考慮退出查詢中心系統，因為該中心未能把服務範圍擴展至覆蓋所有郵政局。郵政局現計劃外判查詢中心未能覆蓋的 109 個分局的查詢熱線，直至查詢中心將來能夠為所有分局的熱線提供服務為止。

**整體表現**

13. 過去四年，查詢中心未能履行在 12 秒鐘內接聽 80%來電的服務承諾，每年只能在時限內接聽 62%至 78%來電。不過，該中心在其他方面則能履行服務承諾，即最少 90%來電者在首次接通後即能得到答覆，而放棄輪候的來電數目亦低於 10%。

14. 參與部門亦因應其服務性質，而就處理投訴和查詢訂有不同的服務承諾及回覆時限。投訴人只會獲告知初步回覆的時限，但不獲知會最後回覆的限期。

**查詢中心處理投訴的角色**

15. 查詢中心的網頁指出，該中心為參與部門接收及處理投訴，並提供一個解決跨部門投訴的有效平台。然而，網頁並沒有解釋查詢中心在統籌上扮演的確實角色。有時候，這會令投訴人感到混淆和失望，甚或不其然對部門更感不滿。

16. 效率促進組在回應本署的查訊時，對查詢中心的角色作以下詮釋：

(a) 提供一個平台，以便市民就所有參與部門的服務提出投訴；

(b) 轉介投訴予適當的部門跟進；

(c) 監察部門的回應（包括發出個案認收函件、初步回覆及最終回覆），讓市民知悉個案進展；

(d) 當某宗投訴涉及多個部門時，協調各有關部門的工作及回應；以及

(e) 若投訴涉及非參與部門，向投訴人提供公眾指南服務。

17. 在籌劃為某部門提供熱線電話接聽服務時，查詢中心會與該部門訂立一個資料庫，以及簽訂服務水平協議（「服務協議」）。資料庫是中心職員在回應市民來電時的主要資料來源，當中載有關於該部門的服務和設施、規則和工序、出版刊物和聯絡詳情，以及特定課題資訊和轉介個案指引等資料。服務協議亦訂明服務水平、時限及處理市民來電的方式，以及查詢中心在處理個案時所獲取的資料。不同部門，因應其服務性質的不同，對服務水平的要求各異。

**查詢中心處理投訴的程序**

18. ***記錄投訴***：接到投訴後，接聽電話的職員會就資料庫的提示向投訴人索取個案詳情，並把資料輸進電腦系統。

19. ***轉介投訴***：職員隨後將個案轉介至負責部門的個案主任。部門若拒絕處理某宗投訴，可以要求查詢中心將個案重新轉介予另一部門。這個重新轉介的過程會持續下去，直至找到願意處理有關投訴的部門為止。

20. ***監察投訴***：查詢中心分四個階段監察投訴的進度，以確保：

(a) 有關部門已接到查詢中心的轉介，並作適時的初步及最終回覆（第一層）；

(b) 當重新轉介投訴出現延誤時，查詢中心職員會知會部門負責人員的上司（第二層）；

(c) 在投訴需重新轉介時，查詢中心職員會把進展通知投訴人；假如投訴經重新轉介兩次，中心職員會促請有關部門澄清所涉權責（第三層）；以及

(d) 在接到投訴後 14 天，假如沒有部門接受責任，查詢中心職員會把投訴提升至部門管理層（初步是部門統籌人員，繼而是投訴主任[5]）定奪（第四層，亦稱為「14 天處理規定」）。

21. ***回覆投訴人***：部門負責人員可決定直接由部門發出，或透過查詢中心轉交初步及最終回覆予投訴人。只有在投訴人要求下，中心才會提供部門負責人員的直接聯絡電話號碼。

22. ***更新及分析資料***：查詢中心會根據部門就個別投訴提供的資料，按需要更新資料庫，並定期提交有關服務要求的統計數字和類別供部門管理層參考。

23. 這些程序適用於所有參與部門。若涉及三項指定熱門課題（**第 25 段**），程序亦大致適用於非參與部門。至於其他非參與部門，查詢中心會提供聯絡電話號碼，並建議來電者直接聯絡有關部門。假如來電者堅持查詢中心轉介，中心也會應允。

**跨部門投訴及服務改善措施**

24. 二零零七年，在查詢中心接到的投訴中，權責涉及一個部門以上的投訴佔 5%（或 10,545 宗）。查詢中心在處理這些投訴時遇到的問題，包括難以識別負責部門，以及部門之間在權責上存在灰色地帶。

[5] *自二零零六年八月起，查詢中心要求每個參與部門提名一名部門統籌人員及一名投訴主任，以便進行聯絡、監察及提升投訴處理的層面。部門統籌人員定為執行人員，而投訴主任則定為首長級人員。*

25. 二零零六年，查詢中心曾檢討處理投訴的方法，以改善處理這類投訴。中心訂定了多項改善措施，其中之一是為三項指定的熱門課題（即植物管理、斜坡安全及拆建廢料）的投訴提供單一聯絡點，即使投訴只涉及非參與部門。

26. 效率促進組亦曾與部門共同探討好幾項方法，在投訴涉及多個部門時，如何找出負責部門處理投訴。然而，這類建議因得不到部門的支持，而一直沒有進展。

**本署觀察所得及意見**

***服務範圍***

27. 我們認為，為公眾提供方便及提升政府效率，設立查詢中心這個構思是可取的。鑑於查詢中心每天收到近 10,000 個來電，有超過九成在首次接通時便已解決問題（**第 13 段**），本署認為就處理查詢或簡單的投訴而言，查詢中心有充足條件成為名符其實的一站式綜合熱線電話查詢中心，涵蓋所有政府部門，甚至公營機構。可惜，查詢中心的名稱與其現時的服務範圍並不相符，與達致**一站式綜合服務**的最終目標亦相距甚遠。在 58 個政府部門及機構當中，中心只負責三分之一，至於其他 21 個政府相關組織或公營機構[6]則不在其服務範圍內。

28. 由於查詢中心的服務範圍有限；即使那 20 個參與部門而言，中心亦一直未能全面接手所有熱線的職能。對大部分政府部門來說，中心基本上只提供公眾指南服務。此外，中心的運作已達飽和，並曾需要推卻額外的工作。

29. 雖然效率促進組聲稱其最終目標是要以 1823 熱線替代所有部門熱線，但卻沒有具體計劃把目標付諸實行。該組現時的立場看來模稜兩可，因為該組既認同某些部門選擇自行提供熱線，又承認 1823 熱線與參與部門熱線共存的好處。為此，效率促進組應重新審研查詢中心的長遠目標。

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[6] *有關政府部門及機構、相關組織及公營機構一覽表，請參看政府網頁 http://tel.directory.gov.hk/index_CHI.html。*

***本身能力問題***

30. 查詢中心本身的權能與其問責職能並不一致。事實上，中心與效率促進組都沒有權力或專業知識處理投訴的具體問題，責成部門接手處理投訴，又或訓斥部門違反經同意的時限及安排。

31. 目前，當沒有部門承擔責任處理某宗投訴時，查詢中心便須要識別責任誰屬。此安排既不實際，又費時失事。市民有合理的期望，認為中心會把他們的投訴適當地轉介負責部門。然而，中心卻完全按照部門的指示進行轉介。中心雖然作為政府的唯一實際「代表」，為這類個案向投訴人「承擔責任」，但除了把問題轉介各有關部門外，並沒有任何額外貢獻。且往往導致相當的延誤而缺乏行動。

32. 本署研究的個案顯示，解決跨部門投訴的最有效和快捷的方法，往往是由部門自發提出及同意的。本署認為，假如對權責誰屬存疑，查詢中心應盡快同時知會各有關部門，讓他們能自行磋商以釐清權責問題。

33. 本署感到遺憾的是，雖然效率促進組曾嘗試研究其他方法，使能較迅速有效地識別負責部門，但是建議一直得不到部門的支持（**第26段**）。其實，當中有些建議已在個別部門實施，並證明有效。既然查詢中心未能促使部門解決一些跨部門的權責不清的糾紛，或許它應盡早把投訴提升至部門管理層處理。如部門未能就投訴責任誰屬達成共悉，查詢中心應透過效率促進組管理層將投訴提升至政策局層面，讓問題得以徹底解決。

***人手問題及應付能力***

34. 本署觀察所得，查詢中心並無妙法解決人手緊絀的問題（參見**第11段**）。人手持續短缺對中心的運作已造成損害，使其不能達到長遠的目標、出現延誤、持續未能履行服務承諾，及令已參與部門考慮退出。本署認為，有需要仔細檢討中心現時的服務範圍及運作模式。

35. 本署認為，查詢中心雖然人手緊絀，但仍為三個部門擔任中央投訴儲存庫（參見**第7段**）的角色，此舉實過份野心，亦超越其主要

職能，情況值得商榷。不過，這個投訴儲存庫系統有不錯功能，值得中心向其他部門推薦，甚至協助部門自行設立有關系統。

***處理投訴的其他問題***

*監察機制*

36. 本署研究的個案顯示，「14 天處理規定」的監察機制（參見**第 20(d)段**）並沒有大幅減少部門在識別責任誰屬所花的時間。由於個案或需進行實地視實察才可釐清權責，待查詢中心把投訴提升至管理層面時往往已遠超 14 天。而對於大多數個案，查詢中心均多酌情押後，直至轉介程序明顯陷入僵局，才把個案提升至管理層面。

37. 儘管如此，在研究的大部分個案中，本署發現，假如**適時**把投訴提升至部門統籌人員（參見**第 20(d)段**）處理，問題往往可以提早解決。有鑑於此，本署認為，盡早啟動提升程序會有利解決問題。

*運作模式及個案的監察*

38. 根據查詢中心現時的運作模式，職員透過電腦記錄，了解投訴的進展，並需即時分析情況及作出適當回應。對於過程冗長的複雜投訴，以及需即時處理的個案，職員能否掌握投訴要點並作出合適回應尤為關鍵。當來電繁忙的時候，職員更須承受壓力，以致可能出現疏漏。

39. 然而，現時的電腦互動介面及資料庫對查詢中心職員的工作幫助不大。因為在現行設定下，職員需開啟一連串的電腦「視窗」，方可取讀有關資料，這令職員很難在短時間內掌握到冗長個案的發展。

*遵照時限*

40. 本署研究的個案顯示，在各個處理投訴的階段，查詢中心及部門經常並沒有嚴格遵照時限採取行動。儘管這可能由於工作量過多，但就部門而言，當局有需要為被投訴的部門訂定某些推動或獎勵計劃，以嘉許並鼓勵部門遵照時限辦事。

*衡量工作表現及滿意程度*

41. 查詢中心為參與部門提供適用於所有來電的整體服務承諾遵辦率。然而，中心並無有系統地衡量或匯報經部門同意的特定行動標準及時限的遵辦率。本署亦留意到，中心並無定期衡量特定類別使用者（例如投訴人）的滿意程度。本署認為，中心應就這些範疇定期進行調查，以監察及改善服務。

*市民的觀感*

42. 市民對查詢中心職能存有誤解及錯誤期望。這與查詢中心現時沒有宣傳其處理投訴職能的範圍有關。中心及其參與部門的網頁是中心的主要宣傳途徑，但這些均沒有說明中心處理投訴的確實職能。中心網頁只提及中心「處理」市民提出的投訴。因此，投訴人可能輕易產生錯誤期望，以為中心可仲裁並評斷其個案。

***間接溝通***

43. 現時，查詢中心代表部門接收及處理投訴的做法，令部門在投訴處理過程中無需直接與投訴人接觸，因為部門的負責人有權決定自行回覆，或是讓中心代為把回覆轉達予投訴人。

44. 本署認為，由查詢中心代部門回覆投訴人的安排對於簡單直接的問題和答案或者可行，但對較為複雜的事情則行不通，因為投訴人通常都需要就部門的回覆作進一步澄清，結果查詢中心要不斷往來轉達投訴人及部門的查問及回覆。對投訴人來說，這處理模式不但累贅而且令人厭煩，亦可能會如本署的個案研究所顯示，導致誤傳或遺漏信息及延誤回覆。

45. 在某些個案，部門甚至選擇經查詢中心與其他部門聯絡。我們認為實多此一舉，費時失事，一般而言，部門間都是直接溝通的。

46. 本署認為，應鼓勵部門直接回覆投訴人，提供更體貼的服務，同時按情況所需作出澄清。查詢中心應明白部分投訴人有需要直接與部門的負責人員討論其投訴，特別是部門的熱線現已轉駁到 1823 ，

令公眾與部門之間的距離更遠。

**結論**

47. 本署認同政府當局提供綜合的一站式熱線服務，以方便公眾及提升政府的辦事效率。整體而言，我們認為查詢中心即使在用量高而人手不足的情況下，仍然努力不懈致力維持服務水平，同時積極改善服務，值得讚賞。

48. 考慮到查詢中心的往績（參見**第13及27段**），本署認為，就處理查詢或簡單的投訴而言，查詢中心有充份條件成為**真正的一站式綜合熱線電話查詢中心**，涵蓋所有政府部門，甚至公營機構。

49. 然而，在處理較為複雜（特別是涉及多個部門）的投訴時，查詢中心則有很多不足之處，而在協調政府部門以處理涉及多個部門的事宜方面，可說是先天不足。

50. 若以查詢中心現時的職務範圍衡量，稱之為「**綜合**」電話查詢中心是名不符實。查詢中心處理投訴的功能和目的，在於它是一個時刻提供跨部門查詢服務的接觸點。但依目前情況所見，查詢中心一直未能達到服務所有政府部門的目標，令公眾感到混淆，原則上不可接受。

51. 查詢中心須作抉擇，若要繼續提供「綜合」服務，則職務範圍必須包括整個政府，而不是只涵蓋一些部門。反之，若決定面對殘酷的現實，只能服務一些部門，便應該清楚公開職務範圍，並採用能充分反映其功能的名稱。

52. 同時，政府當局在查詢中心的長遠服務範圍未有定案前，應改善中心的運作，特別是在處理投訴方面。

## 建議

53. 申訴專員向政府當局提出下列建議，促使這項值得稱讚的服務能有效地推行，實現其目標與使命。

***服務範圍（長期措施）***

(1) 查詢中心須檢討運作模式，按其能力和在其可用資源內為連結整個政府，尤其是在作為公眾指南及處理查詢及簡單投訴方面，提供真正的「綜合」服務，以及為實現此目標而制定短期及長期的計劃。

否則，查詢中心便應考慮根據其有限的服務範圍而更改名稱，以免令公眾有不切實際的期望。

簡言之，查詢中心應把資源改為投放於提供「一站式服務」，作為公眾指南和處理一般查詢及簡單投訴的接觸點。

***改善運作及技術（短期措施）***

*能力及責任承擔*

(2) 效率促進組應主動與決策局商討如何徹底解決跨部門的投訴。

(3) 若投訴個案顯示部門之間的權責界線有所不清晰，查詢中心應立即同時通知各有關的部門，使部門能盡早互相討論，釐清權責範圍。

*中央投訴儲存庫*

(4) 查詢中心應把中央投訴儲存庫的有關技術，向個別部門推廣並協助他們制定綜合投訴監察系統。

*執行監察機制*

(5) 查詢中心應加倍積極執行監察機制，在接到投訴14天後，把沒有部門願意負責的投訴提升至管理層處理。

*職員電腦互動介面*

(6) 查詢中心應徵詢使用職員電腦互動介面的人士的意見，以便進行檢討，確保介面簡易操作。

*須即時處理的個案*

(7) 查詢中心應與部門商議，檢討有關處理須即時回應的投訴的指引及程序，以確保資料庫能夠給予職員清晰的指示。

(8) 查詢中心應加強培訓，提升職員對於須即時處理的投訴及有關的程序指引的意識，以便他們掌握處理這類投訴須注意的事項。

*遵照時限辦事*

(9) 查詢中心應鼓勵或獎賞最能遵照時限辦事的參與部門，例如在年度報告表揚有出色表現的部門，以及推廣最理想的操作方式及措施。

*衡量表現及滿意程度*

(10) 查詢中心應衡量部門履行各項時限及服務承諾方面的效果，並向各部門主管提供有關的數據，以便進行監察。

(11) 查詢中心應進行定期及有系統的調查，了解投訴人的滿意程度。

(12) 查詢中心應定期調查所有服務使用者的滿意程度，對象包括參與及非參與查詢中心服務的部門。

*推廣查詢中心的職務*

(13) 查詢中心應在網頁列明其職能及服務、辦事程序和時限，而政府部門亦應在宣傳推廣的措施說明與查詢中心的關係。

*直接溝通*

(14) 若投訴涉及複雜或眾多問題，應請政府部門直接聯絡投訴人及其他有關部門。

(15) 查詢中心應要求政府部門在提供初步及最終回覆時，註明負責處理投訴的部門人員的姓名及聯絡電話。

54. 本署認同政府當局提供綜合的一站式熱線服務的理念，以方便公眾及提升政府的辦事效率。然而，目前的*運作模式*令查詢中心無法達到上述目標，反而受到極多制肘，且令公眾有不切實際的期望。我們的建議旨在促使這項值得稱讚的服務能返回原定的目標和使命，有效地為整合型政府提供真正的綜合服務。

**效率促進組的意見**

55. 效率促進組已諮詢 20 個參與部門，並表示擬落實本署的所有建議，更會就大部分建議訂明時限。我們在仔細考慮該組的意見後，已把有事實根據的論點及最新的情況適當地納入本署最後的調查報告。

56. 對於本署就查詢中心處理涉及多個部門的投訴的觀點(參見**第 5.11 段**)，效率促進組認為，中心現時的職能是跟進市民的投訴，以及鑑別負責的部門，以便適時和有效地處理有關投訴，而公眾也確實

需要中心繼續這項工作。況且，沒有其他政府機構能夠為市民提供此服務。效率促進組認為，查詢中心須改善的，是以更積極的方式處理涉及多個部門的投訴。

57. 對於本署就「綜合電話查詢中心」名稱提出的建議（參見**第53(1)段**），效率促進組認為，查詢中心目前為 20 個參與部門提供處理查詢、投訴及建議的綜合服務，其名稱恰如其職能。此外，市民可選擇利用電話、電郵、傳真或網上表格聯絡查詢中心，這一點亦反映了中心的綜合性。假如原來有關某參與部門的個案其後被發現實「屬於」另一個部門，則中心有責任把個案轉介適當的個案主任及監察個案進度，以及協調不同部門採取行動及回應投訴，直至個案獲得圓滿解決為止。

58. 效率促進組認為，是「政府熱線」(Citizen's Easy Link)這個名稱而非「綜合電話查詢中心」在某程度上引起誤解，並且令公眾有不切實的期望，以為查詢中心的服務涵蓋整個政府。為此，效率促進組承諾會統一使用「綜合電話查詢中心」的名稱。

59. 至於本署建議查詢中心把服務範圍限於提供公眾指南，以及處理一般查詢和較簡單投訴的服務（參見**第 53(1)段**），效率促進組認為，查詢中心及／或投訴人均難以始初便界定何謂較簡單投訴。該組表示，中心應加強其在處理投訴時候的貢獻，而不是放棄處理複雜的投訴。

60. 為了說明政府部門認同查詢中心的成效，效率促進組引述了兩個近期的事例，指有部門要求中心協助處理一般查詢熱線。

**申訴專員的結語**

61. 本署無意否定設立「綜合電話查詢中心」以提供綜合服務及方便市民的構思，或質疑其優點。政府當局能提供一個方便易記的熱線號碼 1823，晝夜無間地處理有關普遍政府的查詢甚至投訴，對市民顯然大有裨益。我們一直關注的，是查詢中心目前的運作模式、服務範圍及應付服務需求方面是否真正能配合（或可算配合）其原意或最終

目標。

62. 鑑別或解決跨部門權責的工作或許沒有「其他政府機構」擔任，但根據過往經驗，單靠查詢中心以「更積極」的方式處理涉及多個部門的投訴，是不能達致適時及有效地處理這類投訴的。問題根本不在查詢中心。由於查詢中心是為參與部門服務，而參與部門各有其獨特職務，因此中心難以對參與部門作任何強制的行動，只能透過部門之間互相合作盡早解決問題。若要查詢中心向各部門轉接逐一查問及轉介投訴，實在費時失事，亦可能毫無效用。查詢中心可能不知不覺會變成部門互相推搪的媒介。然而，我們認為，查詢中心仍可協助部門進行監察及避免延誤，同時繼續作為投訴人的聯絡點。

63. 本署知悉，效率促進組認為透過查詢中心的名稱，說明中心可由不同接收渠道，綜合解答查詢及處理投訴的職能，(雖則中心只為一些部門提供服務)。然而，本署質疑，普通市民會否對「綜合電話查詢中心」或「Integrated Call Centre」亦有同樣的理解。假如查詢中心並不綜合處理整體政府部門的查詢及投訴服務，則將會繼續有負公眾的期望，亦未能達致其理想和使命的目標。本署認為，效率促進組在認真檢討查詢中心的運作模式後，必須澄清中心的職能及最終目標，免令市民產生混亂，甚至就中心服務提出投訴。

64. 本署之所以建議查詢中心應專注於提供一般查詢和類似公眾指南的服務及處理較簡單投訴，目的在於減輕中心的應付服務需求的付擔，以便騰出人手，以提供已證明卓有成效的核心職務，使服務範圍可涵蓋整個政府，因而成為不節不扣的「綜合」服務中心和名符其實的「綜合電話查詢中心」及「政府熱線」。然而，效率促進組認為，在分辨簡單與複雜投訴方面存在困難。

65. 就此，本署有以下鑑別投訴性質是否簡單的建議，以供參考及作指引之用：假如投訴只涉及單一部門，經查詢中心轉介該部門回覆一次後，投訴人便感到滿意，則屬較簡單投訴。假若投訴人再提出跟進事項或質詢，中心便應把投訴交回所涉部門，以便部門直接作進一步回覆。

66.　至於效率促進組引述的兩個近期的事例，表示有部門要求中心協助提供一般查詢熱線的服務，本署深信，中心有能力處理一般查詢及指南服務。本署所建議的，正是要中心發揮在這方面顯著的優勢及已有往績可證的表現。

**鳴謝**

67.　在這次調查過程中，效率促進組專員及其同事與本署通力合作並提供協助，申訴專員謹致謝意。本署期望該組在落實上述建議方面取得進展。

**申訴專員公署**
**二零零八年六月**

附錄

## 查詢中心處理的熱線、電郵地址及傳真號碼

| 參與年份 | 部門 | 熱線／電郵／傳真 | 號碼／地址 | 備註 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2001 | 食物環境衛生署 | 投訴 | 1. 2923 5050 | |
| | | 部門熱線（電腦對話式查詢系統） | 2. 2868 0000 | |
| | | 電郵（一般） | 3. enquiries@fehd.gov.hk | |
| | | 電郵（清潔香港） | 4. cleanhongkong@fehd.gov.hk | |
| 2001 | 運輸署* | 部門熱線（電腦對話式查詢系統） | 5. 2804 2600 | |
| | | 傳真 － 市區分區辦事處（港島）<br>傳真 － 市區分區辦事處（九龍）<br>傳真 － 新界分區辦事處<br>運輸署總部 | 6. 2824 0399<br>7. 2397 8046<br>8. 2381 3799<br>9. 2824 0433 | 經由部門的相關組別轉介（作為中央資料庫） |
| | | 電郵 | 10. tdenq@td.gov.hk | |
| 2001 | 屋宇署 | 一般查詢及投訴熱線 | 11. 2626 1616 | |
| | | 針對僭建物的投訴熱線（電腦對話式查詢系統） | 12. 2626 1313 | |
| | | 樓宇安全 | 13. 2626 1234 | |
| | | 樓宇安全貸款計劃 | 14. 2626 1579 | |
| | | 樓宇（港島） | 15. 2626 1642 | |
| | | 樓宇（九龍） | 16. 2626 1257 | |
| | | 樓宇（新界） | 17. 2626 1270 | |
| | | 防火規格 | 18. 2135 2416 | |
| | | 牌照 | 19. 2626 1085 | |
| | | 拓展（港島） | 20. 2626 1382 | |
| | | 拓展（九龍） | 21. 2626 1551 | |
| | | 拓展（新界） | 22. 2626 1482 | |
| | | 港口及機場發展和鐵路 | 23. 2626 1566 | |
| | | 地盤監察 | 24. 2626 1700 | |
| | | 斜坡安全 | 25. 2135 2525 | |
| 2001 | 路政署* | 部門熱線 | 26. 2926 4111 | |
| | | 總部 | 27. 2714 1111 | |
| | | 市區 | 28. 2923 7777 | |
| | | 市區（九龍） | 29. 2927 4444 | |
| | | 新界區 | 30. 2926 4222 | |
| | | 路燈部 | 31. 2388 9765 | |
| | | 路燈部 | 32. 8102 6686 | |
| | | 橋樑及結構部 | 33. 2495 1155 | |
| | | 電郵（查詢） | 34. enquiry@hyd.gov.hk | |
| | | 電郵（投訴） | 35. complaint@hyd.gov.hk | |
| | | 傳真（總部、公共關係組及所有其他組別和分區） | 36. 2714 5216<br>37. 2187 2243<br>38-67. 以及各組和分區大約 30 個傳真號碼 | 經由部門的相關組別轉介查詢中心（作為中央資料庫） |

* *查詢中心作為這些部門的中央投訴檔案室，保存經所有渠道收到的投訴的全部記錄。*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2001 | 機電工程署 | 一般查詢 | 68. 2882 8011 | |
| 2002 | 康樂及文化事務署* | 客戶服務 | 69. 2414 5555 | |
| | | 部門熱線（電腦對話式查詢系統） | 70. 2603 4567 | |
| | | 香港公共圖書館熱線 | 71. 2921 0208 | |
| | | 香港中央圖書館熱線 | 72. 3150 1234 | |
| | | 電郵 | 73. enquiries@lcsd.gov.hk | |
| 2002 | 環境保護署 | (退出) | - | - |
| 2002 | 海事處 | 一般查詢 | 74. 2815 0908 | |
| | | 一般查詢（電腦對話式查詢系統） | 75. 2542 3711 | |
| 2002 | 漁農自然護理署 | 部門熱線（電腦對話式查詢系統） | 76. 2708 8885 | |
| | | 動物管理中心 | 77. 2362 3257 | |
| 2002 | 土木工程拓展署 | 斜坡安全 | 78. 2885 5888<br>79. 2762 5165 | |
| 2002 | 差餉物業估價署 | 一般查詢 | 80. 2152 0111 | |
| | | 一般查詢（電腦對話式查詢系統） | 81. 2152 2152 | |
| 2002 | 學生資助辦事處 | 一般查詢（電腦對話式查詢系統） | 82. 2802 2345 | |
| | | 持續進修基金 | 83. 3142 2277 | |
| 2002 | 郵政署 | 一般（電腦對話式查詢系統） | 84. 2921 2222 | 只包括部分而非所有分區郵政局 |
| 2003 | 建築署 | 部門熱線 | 85. 2867 3628 | |
| 2004 | 勞工署 | 一般查詢 | 86. 2717 1771 | 在辦公時間以外只會轉介查詢中心 |
| 2005 | 公司註冊處 | 部門熱線（電腦對話式查詢系統） | 87. 2234 9933 | |
| | | 一般 | 88. 2867 2600<br>89. 2867 2604 | |
| | | 登記文件 | 90. 2867 4582<br>91. 2867 4579<br>92. 2867 4581<br>93. 2867 4580<br>94. 2867 4584 | |
| | | 公司查冊 | 95. 2867 2584<br>96. 2867 2571 | |
| 2006 | 政府資訊科技總監辦公室 | 「香港政府一站通」查詢熱線 | 97. 183 5500 | |
| | | 電郵 | 98. enquiry@1835500.gov.hk | |
| 2007 | 衞生署控煙辦公室 | 查詢及投訴熱線 | 99. 2961 8823 | |
| 2007 | 土地註冊處 | 一般查詢（電腦對話式查詢系統） | 100. 3150 0000 | |
| 2007 | 渠務署 | 渠務投訴熱線 | 101. 2300 1110 | 只限有過多來電時 |
| 2008 | 社會福利署 | 社會福利署熱線有關社會保障的一般查詢 | 102. 2343 2255 | |
| - | 民政事務局 | 馬術熱線 | 103. 2107 9955 | 特別計劃# |
| | | 為北京奧運及殘奧招募義工 | 104. 2591 6690 | 特別計劃# |

* *查詢中心作為這些部門的中央投訴檔案室，保存經所有渠道收到的投訴的全部記錄。*

\# *查詢中心按計劃協助政府部門及決策局，答覆特別公眾計劃查詢熱線的查詢。*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Direct Investigation on Effectiveness of the Integrated Call Centre in Handling Complaints

### Background

The Integrated Call Centre ("ICC"), managed and supervised by the Efficiency Unit ("EU"), was set up in July 2001 to provide a round-the-clock single point of contact for citizens to make enquiries, lodge complaints and make suggestions about services of Government departments participating in the ICC service. The ultimate aim is to replace the myriad of departmental hotlines, fax numbers and email addresses with a Citizen's Easy Link 1823.

2. Since our direct investigation into its overall operation in 2003, ICC has taken on new responsibilities and extended service to cover 20 departments with a total of 104 hotlines, fax lines and emails (**Annex**). Meanwhile, The Ombudsman has continued to receive complaints about ICC service, particularly its handling of complaints. Many of them have come about despite ICC agents (staff handling calls) complying with the relevant rules and procedures.

### The Investigation

3. Concerned that such complaints suggest new or continuing systemic deficiencies in ICC's arrangements, The Ombudsman initiated a direct investigation under Section 7(1)(a)(ii) of The Ombudsman Ordinance, Cap 397, on 20 June 2007 to examine:

(a) the role of ICC in handling public complaints[1];

(b) the procedures and practices for –

(i) referring complaints to the responsible Government departments;

(ii) coordinating and monitoring responses of departments to complaints;

[1] *Unless otherwise specified, references to "complaint" hereafter mean complaints against public services provided by Government departments.*

(iii) following up, particularly when multiple departments are involved;

(iv) keeping complainants informed of progress in the interim; and

(v) giving complainants a final reply;

(c) the adequacy and effectiveness of the current *modus operandi*; and

(d) areas, if any, for improvement.

4. We visited ICC and held meetings with EU and ICC at working and senior management levels. We examined over 100 complaint cases and studied ICC's agreements with client departments, operation manuals, statistics and working files.

**Service Coverage**

5. ICC service covers some but not all aspects/ issues of living in Hong Kong. Currently, ten of its client departments are directly related to environmental hazards and cleanliness – two subject areas targeted by EU at ICC's inception. ICC also serves other departments on a need basis (see **para. 25** for the specified hot topics).

6. Telephone made up 99% of the enquiries and 90% of the complaints received in 2007. ICC currently handles two types of calls: (a) calls made to 1823 direct; and (b) calls made to hotlines of participating departments. Despite ICC's goal of replacing departmental hotlines with 1823, the two still co-exist and remain so with all the participating departments.

7. Apart from telephone calls, ICC handles emails for five of its client departments and faxes for two. In addition, ICC keeps a full register of complaints received through all channels for three client departments (**Fig. 1**).

*Fig. 1 List of ICC clients and ICC's service coverage*

| | Department | Hotline | Email | Fax | Central Repository |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation** | • | | | |
| 2. | **Architectural Services** | • | | | |
| 3. | **Buildings** | • | | | |
| 4. | **Civil Engineering and Development** | • | | | |
| 5. | **Companies Registry** | • | | | |
| 6. | **Drainage Services** | • | | | |
| 7. | **Electrical and Mechanical Services** | • | | | |
| 8. | **Food and Environmental Hygiene** | • | • | | |
| 9. | **Highways** | • | • | • | • |
| 10. | **Labour** | • | | | |
| 11. | **Land Registry** | • | | | |
| 12. | **Leisure and Cultural Services** | • | • | | • |
| 13. | **Marine** | • | | | |
| 14. | **Office of the Government Chief Information Officer** | • | • | | |
| 15. | **Post Office** | • | | | |
| 16. | **Rating and Valuation** | • | | | |
| 17. | **Student Financial Assistance Agency** | • | | | |
| 18. | **Social Welfare** | • | | | |
| 19. | **Tobacco Control Office, Department of Health** | • | | | |
| 20. | **Transport** | • | • | • | • |

**Statistics**

8. ICC classifies incoming communications into four categories: enquiries[2], complaints[3], suggestions[4] and compliments. Complaints make up about one-tenth of all cases answered by ICC.

9. Over the period from 2004 to 2007, the proportion of complaints through 1823 each year has remained more or less the same, making up roughly one-third of all complaints answered annually (**Fig. 2**). This contrasts with enquiries made through 1823, which have grown in proportion from one-fifth of all enquiries in 2004 to one-third of all enquiries in 2007.

*Fig. 2 Monthly average number of the types of cases and their lines of call answered by ICC*

| Case Type | Line called | 2004 (% of total) | 2005 (% of total) | 2006 (% of total) | 2007 (% of total) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Complaints** | **1823** | 4,238 (4%) | 6,625 (4%) | 6,795 (3%) | 7,647 (3%) |
| | **Departmental Hotlines** | 9,946 (8%) | 8,431 (5%) | 11,191 (5%) | 12,477 (6%) |
| | **Ratio (1823 : total complaints)** | 1 : 3 | 1 : 2.3 | 1 : 2.6 | 1 : 2.6 |
| **Enquiries** | **1823** | 20,067 (17%) | 33,414 (18%) | 61,939 (28%) | 77,072 (33%) |
| | **Departmental Hotlines** | 78,659 (67%) | 128,617 (71%) | 134,329 (61%) | 125,749 (54%) |
| | **Ratio (1823 : total enquiries)** | 1 : 4.9 | 1 : 4.8 | 1 : 3.2 | 1 : 2.6 |
| **Others** | **1823** | 2,127 (2%) | 2,718 (1%) | 4,352 (2%) | 4,874 (2%) |
| | **Departmental Hotlines** | 2,969 (2%) | 2,724 (1%) | 2,508 (1%) | 3,378 (2%) |
| **Total cases** | | **118,006 (100%)** | **182,529 (100%)** | **221,114 (100%)** | **231,197 (100%)** |

*(Note: "Others" include compliments, suggestions, nuisance calls, wrongly-dialled calls and test calls. ICC does not maintain separate statistics for these types of calls.)*

*Source: Efficiency Unit*

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[2] *An "enquiry" is one in which the citizen wants only to obtain information.*

[3] *In a "complaint", the citizen is dissatisfied with some Government service and expects the departments to take remedial action and requires a reply.*

[4] *In a "suggestion", the citizen is dissatisfied with some Government service and expect the departments to take remedial action but does not require a reply.*

**Demand for ICC service**

10. Citizens' demand for ICC service has increased markedly from 1.8 million in 2004 to 3.1 million in 2007.

11. Manpower shortage has remained a major concern despite EU's attempt to increase the number of ICC staff and to devise new measures to cope with increasing demand, such as devising group skill sets, exploring new technology and even outsourcing. EU's estimate is that ICC will be operating to full capacity of 230,000 calls per month while fulfilling all the performance pledges within 2008.

12. ICC had to reject six departments' requests for subscription in 2007. Some client departments, e.g. the Post Office ("PO"), had considered dropping out of the ICC system because ICC could not extend its service to cover all PO's branch offices. PO's current plan is to outsource hotlines of 109 branch offices not covered by ICC, until ICC is able to meet its service requirements in the future.

**Overall Performance**

13. For the past four years, ICC has not been able to achieve its overall performance pledge of answering at least 80% of calls within 12 seconds, managing only to answer between 62% and 78% within the timeframe each year. Nonetheless, ICC managed to meet other performance pledges: namely to resolve at least 90% of calls at first point of contact and to have not more than 10% of the calls abandoned.

14. Depending on the nature of their services, ICC client departments have different performance pledges for handling complaints and enquiries. Client departments also have different timeframes for providing interim and final replies. Complainants are informed of the timeframes for interim replies but not final replies.

**ICC's Role in Handling Complaints**

15. ICC website states that ICC handles and processes complaints for the participating departments and provides an effective platform for resolving cross-departmental complaints. However, it does not explain ICC's precise role. On occasions, this has caused much confusion and frustration to complainants, and unwittingly, further grievance against departments.

16. In response to our enquiry, EU defines ICC's role as follows:

(a) to provide a platform for the public to lodge complaints on services of all participating departments;

(b) to refer complaints to the appropriate departments for action;

(c) to monitor departments' response (including case acknowledgement, interim reply and final reply) so that citizens are informed of progress;

(d) to coordinate efforts and responses when a single complaint involves multiple departments; and

(e) to provide directory service for complaints related to services of non-participating departments.

17. In preparation for taking over a department's hotline functions, ICC develops a knowledge base and signs a Service Level Agreement ("SLA") with the department. The knowledge base is ICC's major source of information for responding to the public and contains information on a department's services and facilities, rules and procedures, publications and contact data, topical information and assignment guidelines. An SLA specifies the service levels, timeframes and manner of handling communications from the public and the data thereby generated to be captured by ICC. These service dimensions differ among departments depending on the nature of their services.

**ICC's procedures for handling complaints**

18. ***Logging of complaints.*** Upon receiving a complaint, an ICC agent will, with the aid of the knowledge base, obtain case details and log them into the computer system.

19. ***Referral of complaints.*** The agent will then refer the case to the responsible departmental subject officer. A department which refuses to take responsibility for a complaint may request ICC to reassign the case to another department. This referral and reassignment process will continue until a department accepts responsibility for the complaint.

20. ***Monitoring of complaints.*** ICC monitors the progress of complaints at four levels to ensure that:

(a) departments have received ICC's referral and make timely interim and final replies (level-1);

(b) departmental subject officer's supervisors are aware of delayed reassignment requests (level-2);

(c) ICC agents keep complainants informed of progress when complaints are reassigned and urge departments to clarify responsibility when complaints are reassigned twice (level-3); and

(d) ICC agents escalate complaints with no owner department to departmental management (initially to the Departmental Coordinator and then the Complaint Officer[5]) for decision 14 days after receipt of the complaints (level-4, also known as the "14-day rule").

21. ***Reply to complainants.*** Interim and final replies to complainants are, at departmental subject officers' discretion, either given by departments direct or relayed to the complainants through ICC. The direct contact numbers of departmental subject officers are made available to complainants only upon request.

22. ***Update and analysis.*** Based on the information provided by departments on individual complaints, ICC will update the knowledge base as necessary. Management reports on the statistics and types of service requests are provided to departments regularly.

23. These procedures apply to all client departments. They are also by and large applicable to non-client departments if three specified hot topics are involved **(para. 25)**. For other non-clients, ICC will provide contact numbers and advise callers to approach the departments direct. ICC will make a referral if callers so insist.

**Cross-Departmental Complaints and Service Improvement**

24. Complaints that cut across the responsibilities of more than one department made up 5% (or 10,545) of the complaints in 2007. Some present problems for ICC, including difficulty in identifying owner departments and grey areas in departmental responsibilities.

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[5] *Starting from August 2006, ICC requires each client department to nominate a Departmental Coordinator and a Complaint Officer for liaison, monitoring and escalation purpose. The Departmental Coordinator is pitched at working level while the Complaint Officer is pitched at directorate level.*

25. To improve handling of such complaints, ICC has reviewed its complaint-handling in 2006. Among the improvement measures devised, ICC would act as a single point of contact for complaints related to three specified hot topics (vegetation management, slope safety and construction and demolition waste), even if only non-client departments are involved.

26. EU has also explored several approaches with departments to identify a party to assume responsibility for handling complaints that cut across multiple departments. However, such proposals were not supported by departments, and nothing resulted from EU's efforts.

## Our Observations and Opinions

### *Scope of Service*

27. The setting up of ICC was a commendable plan for public convenience and Government efficiency. Considering its track record of resolving over 90% of nearly 10,000 calls each day at first point of contact (**para. 13**), ICC is well placed to be a truly integrated call centre covering all Government departments and even public bodies for enquiries and simple complaints. However, ICC's current scope of service does not accord with its name and is far from achieving its ultimate goal of an **integrated one-stop** service. ICC carries only one-third of the 58 Government departments and agencies, not to mention the 21 Government-related organisations or public bodies[6].

28. ICC's service is limited and patchy. It has not taken over all the hotline functions even of the 20 client departments. To the majority of Government departments, ICC essentially provides only directory service. Meanwhile, ICC is already operating at full capacity and has had to decline taking on additional commitments.

29. Despite EU's stated goal to replace ultimately all departmental hotlines with 1823, it does not have a concrete plan to achieve it. Its current stance appears ambiguous to us as it recognises some departments' preference for running their own hotlines and considers there to be merit in co-existence of 1823 with client departments' hotlines. In this context, EU should re-examine its long-term goal for ICC.

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[6] *For the list of departments and organisations, please see the official Government website http://tel.directory.gov.hk/index_ENG.html.*

***Capability***

30. There is incongruence between ICC's capability and its accountability. Intrinsically, neither ICC nor EU is vested with the authority or expertise to handle substantive issues of complaint, to command a department to take ownership of a complaint or to take departments to task for deviating from agreed timeframes and arrangements.

31. The current heavy reliance on ICC to identify responsible departments when no department accepts responsibility for a complaint is unrealistic and inefficient. While citizens have legitimate expectations of ICC to pass their complaints aptly to the responsible department, ICC is totally dependent on departments for referral instructions. As the sole *de facto* Government "representative" "accountable" to complainants in such cases, ICC has no value addition except to pass the buck along to departments. This results in significant delay and inaction.

32. From our case studies, the most efficient and effective solution to cross-departmental complaints is often initiated and agreed among the departments themselves. We consider that as soon as responsibility is in doubt, ICC should alert all relevant departments in parallel so that they can discuss and establish ownership among themselves.

33. We regret that EU's attempts at exploring alternative, and potentially more effective and efficient, means of identifying owner departments did not gain support from departments (para. 26). Some of the suggestions have been practised and proven to work among individual departments. We consider that since ICC has not been able to effectively facilitate identification and ownership of responsibility that cut across multiple departments, it should escalate complaints to departmental management as soon as possible. If departments still fail to agree on ownership of complaints, ICC should seek EU senior management's intervention to escalate the complaints to the bureaux level for policy decision.

***Capacity***

34. We observe that ICC's measures to deal with manpower constraint (**para. 11**) are no panacea. Meanwhile, continued manpower shortage has taken considerable toll on ICC's operation, notably failure to meet its long-term goal, delay, continued failure to meet its pledge and risk of existing clients opting out. We see the need for a critical review of ICC's current scope of service and *modus-operandi.*

35. We consider ICC's endeavour to act as central repository for three departments (**para. 7**), despite its tight manpower situation, over-ambitious and arguably beyond its core functions.

However, we consider this system valuable and can be a saleable commodity for promotion among departments with ICC assisting in set-up within the departments themselves upon request.

***Other Problems in Handling Complaints***

*Monitoring mechanism*

36. Our study of cases reveals that the 14-day monitoring mechanism **(para. 20(d))** does not significantly reduce the time departments spend in identifying ownership for complaints. Often, the trigger point of escalation is well after 14 days, since cases may require site inspection to determine responsibility. In most cases, therefore, ICC exercises discretion in postponing escalation until the referral process clearly reaches a deadlock.

37. Nonetheless, in most of the cases studied, we have found that **timely** escalation to Departmental Coordinators (**para. 20(d)**) would have resolved matters earlier. In this light, we see advantage in speedier escalation.

*Mode of operation and supervision of cases*

38. We observe that ICC's current mode of operation taxes individual agents' ability to grasp the status and development of complaints through review of records on screen to discern accurately and respond suitably within a short period of time. Agents' reaction is particularly pivotal for complicated complaints with lengthy history and cases of non-emergency nature but in need of urgent attention. In times of high call volume, such a demand can be particularly taxing for agents and may be prone to omission.

39. However, existing agent-computer interface and knowledge base are not conducive to easing call agents' work. The current agent-computer interface is presented in such a way that agents have to open a series of "windows" on screen to read consecutive actions, making it harder for them to follow development of lengthy cases within a short time.

*Adherence to timeframes*

40. Our case studies reveal that ICC and departments do not always adhere closely to the timeframes for action at various stages of processing a complaint. We understand that ICC agents' inability to adhere to timeframes may be attributable to capacity overload. To promote adherence by departments, some incentive or award scheme needs to be devised for compliant departments to recognise and encourage them.

*Gauging performance and satisfaction*

41. ICC provides client departments with the compliance rate of the overall performance pledges applicable to all calls. However, it does not systematically gauge or report the compliance rate of the specific action standards and timeframes agreed with the departments. We also notice that ICC does not regularly gauge the satisfaction of specific types of users e.g. complainants. We consider that ICC should conduct regular surveys on these areas for service monitoring and improvement.

*Public perception*

42. We notice that the way ICC currently publicises, or rather does not publicise, its role in handling complaints is a source of confusion, misconception and false expectations to the public. As ICC's main channel of publicity, the websites of ICC and its client departments do not set out ICC's exact role in handling complaints. The ICC website merely mentions that ICC "processes" complaints from the public. Complainants, therefore, can easily harbour false expectations that ICC may adjudicate and pass judgment on their cases.

***Indirect communication***

43. The way ICC currently handles complaints on behalf of departments shields the latter from direct contact with complainants upon initial receipt and even further on, as departmental subject officers have full discretion whether to reply to complainants direct or to leave it to ICC to relay their reply.

44. We consider that relay of replies by ICC may work for simple and clear-cut questions and answers. However, it does not work for more complex matters, which often entail clarification of earlier replies and therefore repeated relay by ICC. This is not only cumbersome and irksome for complainants, but may also cause defective or deficient delivery and delay, as shown by our case studies.

45. In some cases, departments actually communicated with other departments through ICC. In our view, this is inefficient and quite unnecessary, when normally the departments would have communicated with one another direct.

46. We consider that departments should be encouraged to reply to complainants direct to make for more personal service and ready clarification where necessary. ICC should recognise the need for some complainants to discuss their complaints with departmental subject officers directly, especially now that even departmental hotlines are transferred to 1823 and the public is more

distanced from departments.

**Conclusions**

47. We believe in the concept of an integrated one-stop call service for public convenience and Government efficiency. Overall, we commend ICC's performance as a call centre, particularly its continuous and earnest efforts to sustain service standards and strive for improvement, notwithstanding the high call volume and manpower constraint.

48. Considering its track record (**paras. 13 and 27**), we consider ICC to be well placed to be a **truly integrated, one-stop and easy-link call centre** to cover all Government departments, and even public bodies, in terms of enquiries and simple complaints.

49. However, the handling of more complex complaints – especially those with multiple departments – leaves much to be desired. ICC inherently lacks the capability to coordinate among Government departments in handling issues involving multiple departments.

50. With its present scope, ICC as an "**integrated**" call centre is a misnomer. ICC's value and purpose in handling complaints lies in its being an all-time access point that transcends departmental boundaries. The current situation, where it continues to fall short of its goal of serving all departments, is misleading to the public and unsatisfactory in principle.

51. ICC has to make a choice. If it is to remain an "integrated" service, then it should encompass the entire Government, not just serve some departments. Alternatively, if it decides that, in the face of harsh reality, it can serve only some departments, its limited scope should be openly acknowledged and duly reflected in its name.

52. Meanwhile, until the Administration has decided ICC's scope of service in the long term, it should improve ICC's current operations, especially in handling complaints.

**Recommendations**

53. The Ombudsman's following recommendations for the Administration aim to help put this commendable service on track to achieve its vision and mission.

***Scope of service (Long-term)***

(1) ICC should review its *modus operandi* with a view to providing a

truly "integrated" service for a "joined-up Government", as intended and map out its short-term and long-term plans to this end, having regard to its capability and capacity.

If not, ICC should consider revising its name to accord with its limited service and to avoid unrealistic public expectations.

In brief, ICC should redirect its resources to offer a "one-stop service" for public sector directory, general enquiries and simple complaints.

***Operational and technical improvements (Short-term)***

*Capability and accountability*

(2) EU should initiate discussion with bureaux to resolve problems with cross-departmental complaints.

(3) Once a complaint case reveals unclear demarcation of responsibility among departments, ICC should alert and ask at once all departments involved to discuss and establish ownership among themselves.

*Central repository*

(4) ICC should extend its techniques and technology associated with central repository service to assist departments to set up a comprehensive complaint tracking system upon request.

*Enforcement of monitoring mechanism*

(5) ICC should enforce the monitoring mechanism more proactively by escalating promptly any complaint, for which no department would accept responsibility, 14 days after receipt of the complaint.

*Agent-computer interface*

(6) ICC should review existing agent-computer interface in consultation with its users to ensure that the interface is simple and readily comprehensible.

*Cases requiring urgent attention*

(7) ICC should confer with departments to review the guidelines and procedures for handling complaints requiring urgent attention to ensure that the knowledge base provides clear instructions to agents.

(8) To familiarise call agents with situations that require urgent attention, ICC should strengthen training to increase their awareness of such complaints and the guidelines on procedures.

*Adherence to timeframes*

(9) ICC should provide incentives or awards to client departments for best record for compliance by, say, publishing yearly reports to recognise good performers and promote best practices.

*Gauging performance and satisfaction*

(10) ICC should gauge the compliance rates of the various timeframes and departmental performance pledges and to provide such data to Heads of Departments for monitoring purpose.

(11) ICC should conduct regular and systematic surveys to gauge complainants' satisfaction level.

(12) ICC should regularly survey the satisfaction level of all users of ICC service i.e. both client and non-client departments.

*Promote understanding of ICC's role*

(13) ICC should spell out in its website its role and service, procedures and timeframes. Departments should likewise in their own publicity

measures clarify their relationship with ICC.

*Direct communication*

(14) Departments should be requested to make direct contact with complainants and fellow-departments where complex or multiple issues are concerned.

(15) ICC should request departments to state the name and contact number of departmental officers in charge of a complaint in both interim and final replies.

54. We support having an integrated one-stop call service for public convenience and Government efficiency. However, ICC's present *modus operandi* does not achieve this. Instead, it labours under considerable constraint and raises unrealistic public expectations. Our recommendations aim to help put this commendable service on track to achieve its vision and mission of providing a truly integrated service for a joined-up Government.

**Comments from EU**

55. Head of EU has consulted the 20 client departments and indicated her intention to implement all our recommendations, even specifying timeframes for most of them. Having carefully considered her comments, we have incorporated factual points and recent updates into our final report, where appropriate.

56. On our observations about ICC's handling of cross-departmental complaints **(para. 5.11)**, EU considers that there is a genuine public need for ICC to continue to perform its existing function, i.e. to respond to citizens' complaints and identify the responsible party to resolve cross-departmental issues in a timely and effective manner. Besides, there is no alternative Government body that a citizen can turn to for such role. EU, therefore, reckons that ICC should instead just be more robust with its approach in handling such complaints.

57. As for the recommendation about the name "Integrated Call Centre" **(para. 53(1))**, EU considers the name an appropriate description of ICC's functions, as ICC is now providing an integrated service covering the handling of enquiries, complaints and suggestions for its 20 client departments. It is also integrated in the sense that citizens may select to contact ICC by phone, email, fax or online form. If a case originally related to one client department is later found to "belong" to another, ICC is responsible for referring the case to the correct

subject officer and monitoring the progress, as well as coordinating actions and responses of different departments, until the case is satisfactorily resolved.

58. EU considers that the name "Citizen's Easy Link" (政府熱線), rather than "Integrated Call Centre", is misleading to a certain extent and has created unrealistic public expectations of ICC covering the whole Government. In this context, EU undertakes to standardise ICC's name to "Integrated Call Centre".

59. On the recommendation that ICC should offer only service for public sector directory, general enquiries and simple complaints (**para. 53(1)**), EU considers it difficult both for ICC and/or a complainant to define what are simple complaints at the outset. Instead of giving up its role in handling complex complaints, EU considers it better to improve its value-addition.

60. EU cited two recent instances of departments seeking ICC assistance in handling general enquiries hotlines to exemplify departments' recognition of ICC's effectiveness.

**OMBUDSMAN'S FINAL REMARKS**

61. We do not decry or dispute the merits of an "integrated call centre" as a concept for unity of service and convenience to the public. Clearly a single easily memorable hotline (1823) for enquiries, and even complaints, round-the-clock across the whole spectrum of Government departments is a boon for Hong Kong citizens. Our concern has been, and remains, whether ICC's current mode of operation, scope of service and capacity can truly match (or be said to match) its original intention or ultimate ambition.

62. There may not be any "alternative Government body" to identify or resolve cross-departmental responsibilities. However, experience has shown that for timely and effective resolution of cross-departmental complaints, it is not adequate just for ICC to be "more robust" in handling such complaints. The fundament problem does not lie with ICC. Given ICC as a service centre for client departments, each with specific individual duties, it is difficult for ICC to impose upon them but early resolution depends on inter-departmental cooperation. It is cumbersome and time-consuming, possibly ineffectual, for a service agent like ICC to be checking out one department after another. In this connection, ICC could unwittingly become an agent for buck-passing. Nevertheless, ICC can still help departments monitor and guard against delays and continue to be the contact point for complainants.

63. We note EU's rendition of its name as an indication of its integrating the functions of answering enquiries and complaints, albeit only for some departments, through different

modes of reception. However, it is questionable whether the common citizen would view the nomenclature "Integrated Call Centre" or "綜合電話查詢中心" in the same context. Without integrating the services for enquiries and complaints of all Government departments, ICC shall continue to fall short of public expectations and the express objective in its own vision statement. It is necessary that EU clarify the role and ultimate goal for ICC after a realistic review of its *modus operandi,* to avoid confusing the public and attracting complaints against ICC itself.

64. Our recommendation that ICC should concentrate on general and directory enquiries and simple complaints aims to relieve ICC capacity for delivery of core duties for which it has proven its value and to facilitate its coverage of Government overall, thus becoming a truly "integrated" call centre, the *bona fide* "綜合電話查詢中心" and "政府熱線". However, EU has expressed concern over the difficulty in differentiating simple from complex complaints.

65. For identifying simple complaints, we suggest for consideration and as a guide, those involving a single department and fully satisfying the complainant after one referral to the department for response via ICC. If follow-up issues or queries are raised, ICC should return the complaint to the department for further reply direct.

66. Regarding the two cited recent instances of departments seeking ICC assistance in handling general enquiries hotlines, we have no doubt about ICC's ability in handling general and directory enquiries. Our recommendations are precisely to capitalise on this clear advantage and track record of ICC.

**Acknowledgements**

67. The Ombudsman thanks the Head of EU and her colleagues for cooperation and assistance throughout this investigation. We look forward to their progress in implementing our recommendations.

**Office of the Ombudsman**
**June 2008**

## Hotlines, Email Addresses and Fax Numbers Handled by ICC

| Year of participation | Department | Hotlines/email/fax | Nos / Address | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2001 | FEHD | Complaint | 1. 2923 5050 | |
| | | Departmental Hotline (IVRS) | 2. 2868 0000 | |
| | | Email (General) | 3. enquiries@fehd.gov.hk | |
| | | Email (Clean HK) | 4. cleanhongkong@fehd.gov.hk | |
| 2001 | TD* | Departmental Hotline (IVRS) | 5. 2804 2600 | |
| | | Fax - Urban Regional Office (HK)<br>Fax - Urban Regional Office (Kln)<br>Fax - NT Regional Office<br>TD Headquarters | 6. 2824 0399<br>7. 2397 8046<br>8. 2381 3799<br>9. 2824 0433 | Redirected manually by respective sections of department (as central repository) |
| | | Email | 10. tdenq@td.gov.hk | |
| 2001 | BD | General Enquiry & Complaint Hotline | 11. 2626 1616 | |
| | | Complaint Hotline Against Unauthorised Building Works (IVRS) | 12. 2626 1313 | |
| | | Building Safety | 13. 2626 1234 | |
| | | Building Safety Loan Scheme | 14. 2626 1579 | |
| | | Existing Building HK | 15. 2626 1642 | |
| | | Existing Building Kln | 16. 2626 1257 | |
| | | Existing Building NT | 17. 2626 1270 | |
| | | Fire Safety | 18. 2135 2416 | |
| | | Licensing | 19. 2626 1085 | |
| | | New Building HK | 20. 2626 1382 | |
| | | New Building Kln | 21. 2626 1551 | |
| | | New Building NT | 22. 2626 1482 | |
| | | Port and Airport Development & Rail | 23. 2626 1566 | |
| | | Site Monitoring | 24. 2626 1700 | |
| | | Slope Safety | 25. 2135 2525 | |
| 2001 | HyD* | Departmental Hotline | 26. 2926 4111 | |
| | | Headquarter | 27. 2714 1111 | |
| | | Urban Region | 28. 2923 7777 | |
| | | Urban (Kowloon) Region | 29. 2927 4444 | |
| | | NT Region | 30. 2926 4222 | |
| | | Lighting Division | 31. 2388 9765 | |
| | | Lighting Division | 32. 8102 6686 | |
| | | Bridge & Structure Division | 33. 2495 1155 | |
| | | Email (enquiry) | 34. enquiry@hyd.gov.hk | |
| | | Email (complaint) | 35. complaint@hyd.gov.hk | |
| | | Fax (Headquarters, Public Relations Unit and all other sections, units, regions) | 36. 2714 5216<br>37. 2187 2243<br>38-67. and around 30 fax nos to individual units, sections, regions | Redirected manually by respective sections of department to ICC (as central repository) |
| 2001 | EMSD | General Enquiry | 68. 2882 8011 | |

* *ICC acts as central complaints registry for these departments by maintaining a full register of complaints received through all channels.*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2002 | LCSD* | Customer Service | 69. 2414 5555 | |
| | | Departmental Hotline (IVRS) | 70. 2603 4567 | |
| | | Hong Kong Public Library Hotline | 71. 2921 0208 | |
| | | Hong Kong Central Library Hotline | 72. 3150 1234 | |
| | | Email | 73. enquiries@lcsd.gov.hk | |
| 2002 | EPD | (withdrawn) | - | - |
| 2002 | MD | General Enquiry | 74. 2815 0908 | |
| | | General Enquiry (IVRS) | 75. 2542 3711 | |
| 2002 | AFCD | Departmental Hotline (IVRS)) | 76. 2708 8885 | |
| | | Animal Management Centre | 77. 2362 3257 | |
| 2002 | CEDD | Slope Safety | 78. 2885 5888<br>79. 2762 5165 | |
| 2002 | RVD | General Enquiry | 80. 2152 0111 | |
| | | General Enquiry (IVRS) | 81. 2152 2152 | |
| 2002 | SFAA | General Enquiry (IVRS) | 82. 2802 2345 | |
| | | Continuing Education Fund | 83. 3142 2277 | |
| 2002 | Post Office | General (IVRS) | 84. 2921 2222 | Covers some, not all, branch offices |
| 2003 | Arch SD | Departmental Hotline | 85. 2867 3628 | |
| 2004 | LD | General Enquiry | 86. 2717 1771 | Outside normal office hours only to ICC |
| 2005 | CR | Departmental Hotline (IVRS) | 87. 2234 9933 | |
| | | General | 88. 2867 2600<br>89. 2867 2604 | |
| | | Registration of documents | 90. 2867 4582<br>91. 2867 4579<br>92. 2867 4581<br>93. 2867 4580<br>94. 2867 4584 | |
| | | Company Search | 95. 2867 2584<br>96. 2867 2571 | |
| 2006 | OGCIO | GovHK Enquiry Hotline | 97. 183 5500 | |
| | | Email | 98. enquiry@1835500.gov.hk | |
| 2007 | TCO / DH | Enquiry & Complaint Hotline | 99. 2961 8823 | |
| 2007 | LR | General Enquiry (IVRS) | 100. 3150 0000 | |
| 2007 | DSD | Drainage Complaint Hotline | 101. 2300 1110 | Overflown calls only |
| 2008 | SWD | General Enquiry on Social Security Matter for SWD Hotline | 102. 2343 2255 | |
| - | HAB | Equestrian Hotline | 103. 2107 9955 | Ad Hoc Project# |
| | | Recruitment of Volunteers for the Beijing Olympic & Paralympic Games | 104. 2591 6690 | Ad Hoc Project# |

# *ICC assists departments and bureaux on a project basis by answering enquiry hotlines of ad hoc public campaigns.*

# LEGEND OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| **AFCD** | Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department |
| **Arch SD** | Architectural Services Department |
| **BD** | Buildings Department |
| **CEDD** | Civil Engineering and Development Department |
| **CR** | Companies Registry |
| **CSB** | Civil Service Bureau |
| **D of Adm** | Director of Administration |
| **D of J** | Department of Justice |
| **DH** | Department of Health |
| **DSD** | Drainage Services Department |
| **EMSD** | Electrical and Mechanical Services Department |
| **EPD** | Environmental Protection Department |
| **ETWB** | Environment, Transport and Works Bureau |
| **EU** | Efficiency Unit |
| **FEHD** | Food and Environmental Hygiene Department |
| **FSD** | Fire Services Department |
| **GEO** | Geotechnical Engineering Office, Civil Engineering and Development Department |
| **HAD** | Home Affairs Department |
| **HD** | Housing Department |
| **HKPF** | Hong Kong Police Force |
| **HyD** | Highways Department |
| **ICC** | Integrated Call Centre |
| **IVRS** | Interactive Voice Response System |
| **LCSD** | Leisure and Cultural Services Department |
| **LD** | Labour Department |
| **LR** | Land Registry |
| **MD** | Marine Department |
| **OGCIO** | Office of the Government Chief Information Officer |
| **PO** | Post Office |
| **RVD** | Rating and Valuation Department |

| | |
|---|---|
| **SFAA** | Student Financial Assistance Agency |
| **SWD** | Social Welfare Department |
| **TD** | Transport Department |
| **WSD** | Water Supplies Department |

# 1

# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

**1.1** The Integrated Call Centre ("ICC"), managed and supervised by the Efficiency Unit ("EU") of the Government Secretariat, was set up in July 2001 to provide a round-the-clock single point of contact for citizens to make enquiries, lodge complaints and make suggestions about services of Government departments participating in the ICC service.

**1.2** In 2003, The Ombudsman conducted a direct investigation into ICC's overall operation and made recommendations on a number of broad operational issues. They have by and large been taken on board by ICC (**Annex 1**).

**1.3** Since our 2003 direct investigation, ICC has taken over part or all of the hotline functions of eight further departments. ICC now handles 104 hotlines, fax lines and emails operated by 20 Government departments (**Annex 2**).

**1.4** Meanwhile, The Ombudsman has continued to receive complaints that are directly or indirectly related to ICC's handling of complaints. These are mainly about delay in or lack of follow-up action, inappropriate processing or manner of handling complaints lodged with the departments or ICC itself. Many of them have come about despite ICC agents (staff handling calls) complying with the relevant rules and procedures. Such complaints received by The Ombudsman suggest new or continuing systemic deficiencies in ICC's arrangements, further to our 2003 direct investigation.

**1.5** In this context, The Ombudsman notified the Head of EU on 20 June 2007 of her decision to initiate a direct investigation under Section 7(1)(a)(ii) of The

Ombudsman Ordinance, Cap 397. The Head of EU pledged full cooperation and assistance in the investigation.

## AMBIT

**1.6** The ambit of this investigation includes:

(a) the role of ICC in handling public complaints;

(b) the procedures and practices for –

(i) referring complaints to the responsible Government departments;
(ii) coordinating and monitoring responses of departments to complaints;
(iii) following up, particularly when multiple departments are involved;
(iv) keeping complainants informed of progress in the interim; and
(v) giving complainants a final reply;

(c) the adequacy and effectiveness of the current *modus operandi*; and

(d) areas, if any, for improvement.

**1.7** Throughout this report, unless otherwise specified, references to "complaint" mean complaints about public services provided by Government departments. ICC's definition of "complaint" is discussed in Chapter 2.

## METHODOLOGY

**1.8** In addition to information provided by ICC in response to our inquiries, we studied:

(a) the Service Level Agreements signed between ICC and client departments;
(b) extracts of operation manuals for its computerised database and answering system;
(c) statistical data on performance for analysis; and
(d) working files of ICC relevant to our study.

**1.9** We held meetings with EU and ICC at both the working and senior management levels. We also visited ICC to observe how its agents handle calls.

**1.10** We examined 50 concluded cases against ICC received by this Office (as at February 2008) over the period from July 2001 to December 2007 and took reference from over 60 other complaints involving (but not against) ICC.

**1.11** Through the media, this Office invited members of the public to send in their comments on the matter during the period from 5 July 2007 to 6 August 2007. No submission was received.

## THE INVESTIGATION REPORT

**1.12** A Draft Investigation Report was sent to the Head of EU on 5 May 2008 for comments. These were received on 22 May 2008. This Final Report was issued on 23 June 2008.

# 2

# *ICC SERVICE*

## VISION AND MISSION

**2.1** ICC is a Government initiative to improve the quality of its interaction with citizens through the provision of all-time access to trained personnel able to respond to a range of enquiries and complaints that cut across departmental boundaries. It has been the long-term goal of EU to create a central operation to replace the myriad of departmental hotlines, fax lines and email addresses. ICC aims at relieving not only citizens of the trouble of finding out which department to approach or which number to call for specific matters, but also departments from day-to-day administration of frontline call-handling activities.

**2.2** ICC's vision statement, as set out in its website, reads:

> "Our vision is to be the new benchmark for public sector call centre operations and to provide a key driver for the creation of a joined-up Government."

**2.3** ICC's mission statement in its website reads:

> (a) "to provide a caring and one-stop service for the public to make enquiries and lodge complaints;
> (b) to improve productivity, service quality and accountability in the enquiry service provided;
> (c) to provide consistent and accurate information to the public in a timely manner; and
> (d) to provide an effective platform for resolving cross-departmental complaints."

## SERVICE COVERAGE

### Subject areas and participating departments

**2.4** At inception in 2001, EU aimed to take over the departmental hotline functions related to environmental hazards and cleanliness. EU identified in 1999 the following 16 departments as relevant:

| | |
|---|---|
| Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation ("AFCD") | Transport ("TD") |
| Buildings ("BD") | Urban Services[1] |
| Civil Engineering and Development ("CEDD") | Environmental Protection ("EPD") |
| Drainage Services ("DSD) | Fire Services ("FSD") |
| Electrical and Mechanical Services ("EMSD") | Home Affairs ("HAD") |
| Highways ("HyD") | Housing ("HD") |
| Marine ("MD") | Hong Kong Police Force ("HKPF") |
| Regional Services[2] | Water Supplies ("WSD") |

However, to date, six of these departments (underlined) are still not ICC clients.

**2.5** Since 2002, ICC has expanded its service to cover 10 other departments:

| | |
|---|---|
| Architectural Services ("Arch SD") | Post Office ("PO") |
| Companies Registry ("CR") | Rating and Valuation ("RVD") |
| Labour ("LD") | Social Welfare ("SWD") |
| Land Registry ("LR") | Student Financial Assistance Agency ("SFAA") |
| Office of the Government Chief Information Officer ("OGCIO") | Tobacco Control Office ("TCO") (Department of Health) |

---

[1] *Regional Services Department and Urban Services Department were restructured in 2000 into the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD") and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD"), both now ICC clients.*

[2] *See Note 1.*

**2.6** A full list of the 20 departments currently participating, their year of subscription and their hotlines, email addresses and/or fax lines handled by ICC is at **Annex 2.** It remains EU's goal to expand the ICC approach across the entire Government in the long term.

**Classification of incoming communications**

**2.7** ICC classifies incoming communications into four main categories: complaint, suggestion, enquiry and compliment.

(a) In a "complaint", the citizen is dissatisfied with some Government service and expects the departments to take remedial action and requires a reply.

(b) In a "suggestion", the citizen is dissatisfied with some Government service and expects the departments to take remedial action but does not require a reply.

(c) In an "enquiry", the citizen wants only to obtain information.

(d) In a "compliment", the citizen shows appreciation for some Government service or individual staff.

**Fig. 1** below sets out the monthly average number of these types of calls. "Others" include compliments, suggestions, nuisance calls, wrongly-dialled calls and test calls. ICC does not maintain separate statistics for these types of calls.

*Fig. 1 Monthly average number of the types of cases and their lines of call answered[3] by ICC*

| Case Type | Line called | 2004 (% of total) | 2005 (% of total) | 2006 (% of total) | 2007 (% of total) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Complaints** | **1823** | 4,238 (4%) | 6,625 (4%) | 6,795 (3%) | 7,647 (3%) |
| | **Departmental Hotlines** | 9,946 (8%) | 8,431 (5%) | 11,191 (5%) | 12,477 (6%) |
| | **Ratio (1823 : all complaints)** | 1 : 3 | 1 : 2.3 | 1 : 2.6 | 1 : 2.6 |
| **Enquiries** | **1823** | 20,067 (17%) | 33,414 (18%) | 61,939 (28%) | 77,072 (33%) |
| | **Departmental Hotlines** | 78,659 (67%) | 128,617 (71%) | 134,329 (61%) | 125,749 (54%) |
| | **Ratio (1823 : all enquiries)** | 1 : 4.9 | 1 : 4.8 | 1 : 3.2 | 1 : 2.6 |
| **Others** | **1823** | 2,127 (2%) | 2,718 (1%) | 4,352 (2%) | 4,874 (2%) |
| | **Departmental Hotlines** | 2,969 (2%) | 2,724 (1%) | 2,508 (1%) | 3,378 (2%) |
| **Total cases** | | **118,006 (100%)** | **182,529 (100%)** | **221,114 (100%)** | **231,197 (100%)** |

**2.8** Over the period from 2004 to 2007, 1823 has become more popular as a means for making enquiries, making up nearly one-fifth of all enquiries in 2004 and more than one-third of all enquiries in 2007. The proportion of complaints lodged through 1823 has remained more or less the same in 2004 and 2007, making up about one-third of all complaints answered in both years.

**Means of communication**

**2.9** ICC service encompasses a range of different means of communication with the public, including the Citizen's Easy Link hotline 1823, email, fax, on-line

[3] *There is a distinction between calls "received by ICC" and calls "answered by ICC". The former are calls whose caller opt to speak to a call agent (through pressing a number button under prompt). The latter are calls which have actually reached a call agent.*

*The former figure is bigger than the latter because between opting to speak to an agent and actually reaching an agent, a caller may abandon a call or may choose to record a voicemail message (through pressing a number button under prompt).*

forms and letter. In all its communication to citizens, except calls for PO and SFAA, ICC reveals its identity.

*Telephone*

**2.10** Telephone is the predominant channel through which citizens communicate with ICC. It made up 99% of the enquiries and 90% of the complaints received in 2007. ICC currently handles two types of calls: (a) calls made to 1823 direct; and (b) calls made to hotlines of participating departments. Despite ICC's goal of replacing departmental hotlines with 1823, the two still co-exist and remain so with all the participating departments.

*Email and fax*

**2.11** ICC handles emails received through the departmental email addresses of five departments: **FEHD, HyD, LCSD, OGCIO** and **TD**.

**2.12** ICC also handles faxes received through the departmental fax lines of two departments: **HyD** and **TD**. See **Annex 2** for the list of hotlines, email addresses and fax lines handled by ICC.

**Central repository**

**2.13** ICC keeps a full register of complaints received through all channels for three departments: **HyD, LCSD** and **TD**. This facilitates recording, and thus tracking of cases. It can be a useful management information system and monitoring tool.

**2.14** In preparation for using the ICC system as a central repository, the departments have to redesign the internal workflow and procedures to ensure that complaints received by individual officers from every channel are captured in the ICC system. Thereafter, an officer receiving a complaint from any channel has to fax the details of the case to ICC for input into the ICC system.

## DEMAND FOR ICC SERVICE

### Citizens' demand

**2.15** Citizens' demand for ICC service has been increasing markedly during the past four years. Since 2004, the number of calls received by ICC has increased by 70% from 1.8 million to 3.1 million (**Fig. 2**).

*Fig.2 Yearly total of calls received[4] by ICC*

| 2004 | 2005 (% increase over previous year) | 2006 (% increase over previous year) | 2007 (% increase over previous year) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1,810,740 | 2,449,600 (↑ 35%) | 2,775,797 (↑ 13%) | 3,076,913 (↑ 11%) |

### Departments' participation

**2.16** Departments participate in ICC service by agreement. Since the inception of ICC, 21 departments have participated in ICC service but EPD dropped out in 2002. ICC is now serving 20 client departments plus a number of non-client departments on need and topical basis (**para. 3.25**). Lands D has agreed in principle to participate in 2008.

**2.17** ICC has not been able to meet all demands for subscription to its service. In 2007, ICC rejected six departments' requests for subscription due to manpower constraints. EU's estimate is that, within 2008, ICC will be operating to full capacity of 230,000 calls per month while fulfilling all the performance pledges (**paras. 2.25 and 2.26**).

**2.18** ICC's inability to cater for some departments' need for expansion has caused some client departments to consider dropping out of the ICC system. For example, in 2002, PO turned in part of its branch office enquiry hotlines to ICC and requested in 2007 that ICC take over the hotline function of its remaining 109 branch offices. However, this was rejected by ICC for reason of resource constraint. PO had considered setting up its own centralised call centre at one time. PO's current plan is to outsource hotlines of 109 branch offices not covered by ICC, until ICC is able to meet its service requirements in the future.

[4] *See Note 3.*

## STAFF AND TRAINING

**2.19** Over 90% of ICC staff are employed on non-civil service contract ("NCSC") terms. The organisation chart of ICC is at **Annex 3**. As at 14 May 2008, ICC has a total of 249 NCSC staff, 8 civil servants and part-time staff equivalent to 36 full-time members. ICC agents and supervisors are deployed on nine shifts. The number of staff for each shift varies, having regard to the anticipated call volume.

### Manpower Constraint

**2.20** Although ICC and EU have been trying to match the number of staff to the increase in demand for its service, manpower shortage has remained a major concern. First, ICC is under a general restriction in NCSC establishment of not more than the absolute maximum of 232[5]. To cope with increase in demand, ICC has since March 2006 employed part-time staff and awarded contracts for hire of service from agencies in the private sector.

**2.21** Moreover, ICC has experienced continuing difficulty in retaining staff. The average monthly turnover rate of call agents in 2007 was 6.9%. In March and May 2007, as many as 8.05% and 9.52% of the call agents left ICC. ICC considers the high staff turnover to be the result of the lack of career prospect for call agents and the general manpower shortage in recent years. To make for a more stable workforce, ICC has taken part in the recruitment service of LD and has lowered the academic entry requirements for English language for call agents from five passes (including English and Chinese) to four (including Chinese, but not English) in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination.

**2.22** In the light of its manpower constraints, ICC has been actively exploring an alternative mode of operation, namely outsourcing. It launched in July 2007 a Market Sounding Exercise to invite potential service providers in the private sector to propose alternative approaches in a bid to outsource the ICC service. It has also explored the use of new technology, namely the Automatic Speech Recognition system which assists agents in screening calls for different departments.

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[5] *In accordance with the Civil Service Bureau promulgation regarding employment of NCSC staff, ICC NCSC establishment has been capped at the employment position at 30 June 2006 of 208. To cope with increasing demand for ICC service, EU had further obtained CSB's approval to raise this ceiling to 232. CSB approval will be required if this number exceeds by more than 5% ( i.e. 243).*

### Training

**2.23** All new recruits, part-time and full-time, must go through entry training to learn the necessary skills for handling calls. In the light of manpower constraints and workload increase, ICC introduced the Group Skill approach in 2006 to cut down the training time for call agents. Instead of training all call agents on all departmental knowledge, agents are trained in the core skills for handling departments with the most calls: namely **FEHD, HyD, LD** and **TD**; plus a skill set for handling three to four other departments. Calls are distributed, manually or by the computer system, randomly to the agents within related skill sets. This approach has cut training time by four months to only five months – previously it required nine months.

## PERFORMANCE PLEDGES

**2.24** ICC performance pledges vary according to the different means of communication.

### Telephone calls

**2.25** ICC's performance pledges for the handling of all types of calls have remained unchanged since its inception in 2001. They are:

(a) to resolve not less than 90% of calls at first point of contact;

(b) to have less than 10% of calls abandoned by caller while waiting for an operator to answer;

(c) to receive the call within 12 seconds for not less than 80% of the calls; and

(d) to achieve a score of 3.8 out of a scale of 5 in the external customer satisfaction survey.

**2.26** Pledges (a), (b) and (d) have been achieved by ICC during the past four years, but not pledge (c) in any of those four years (**Fig. 3**).

*Fig. 3 Overall Performance of ICC*

| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | Pledge |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **First-Time Resolution** | | | | | |
| Annual average | 91% | 93% | 92% | 90% | ⩾90% |
| Range of monthly average | **88–93%** | 90–94% | **88–93%** | **85–95%** | |
| **Abandonment** | | | | | |
| Annual average | 3% | 7% | 4% | 5% | ⩽10% |
| Range of monthly average | 1–8% | 2–10% | 2–5% | 2–8% | |
| **Calls received within 12 secs** | | | | | |
| Annual average | **74%** | **62%** | **78%** | **68%** | ⩾80% |
| Range of monthly average | **51–83%** | **47–81%** | **72–85%** | **45–85%** | |
| **Response Time** | | | | | |
| Annual average | 17 secs | 32 secs | 13 secs | 20 secs | - |
| Range of monthly average | 9–25 secs | 11–50 secs | 8–17 secs | 10–40 secs | |
| **Call-Handling Time** | | | | | |
| Annual average | 251 secs | 257 secs | 247 secs | 259 secs | - |
| Range of monthly average | 227–272 secs | 233–269 secs | 231–260 secs | 234–276 secs | |
| **External Customer Satisfaction Survey** | | | | | |
| Annual average | 4.15 | 4.16 | 4.24 | 4.16 | ⩾3.8 |

*Note: Figures in **bold** denote performance below pledged level.*

**2.27** ICC does not have a general performance pledge for handling complaints or enquiries *per se*. The performance pledge of different client departments differs depending on their nature of work. However, each ICC client department has its own agreed timeframes for providing interim and final replies to complaint and enquiry (**Annex** 4). Since 2007, ICC has been informing callers of the timeframes for interim replies. The timeframes for final replies are provided only upon request.

**Other means of communication**

**2.28** ICC's performance pledges for handling email, and fax and voicemail from citizens and/or departments are:

(a) at least 90% of the emails and faxes should be responded to within 24 hours of receipt (for both citizens and departments); and

(b) at least 90% of the voicemails should be checked within three hours of recording (for citizens only).

**2.29** In 2007, ICC was not able to meet the pledge, and managed to respond to 66% of the total of 201,981 emails and faxes from the public and departments. The monthly average fluctuated between 40% and 93%.

**2.30** For voicemails, ICC was not able to meet the pledge, and managed to check 71% of the total of 58,510 voicemails from the public in 2007.

**Satisfaction ratings**

**2.31** Since 2003, ICC has been regularly monitoring the general satisfaction level of callers through its Interactive Voice Response System ("IVRS") customer satisfaction survey system. Callers are invited to participate and voluntarily respond to the surveys after completing calls to ICC. A summary of the results is at **Annex 5**. Respondents are most satisfied with the manner and attitude of ICC call agents.

**2.32** There is no satisfaction survey on individual types of calls or on client departments towards ICC service. In the course of our investigation, ICC conducted, on an *ad hoc* basis, a focus group session for citizens who have lodged complaints with ICC. The group cited problems in ICC's complaint-handling[6] not hitherto revealed in previous general surveys.

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[6] *Problems cited by participants include inadequate publicity of 1823, difficulty in accessing departmental officers and departmental buck-passing.*

## TAKING OVER HOTLINE FUNCTIONS

**2.33** In considering whether to take over a department's hotline functions, ICC takes into account the service scope, achievable benefits, service level and costs, which are assessed through a scoping study with the department. The required staffing level will be based on call volume and average call handling time. On-site support from the departments during the trial period and review of procedures and knowledge base ensure smooth operation. A department, upon joining ICC, has to give up funding savings, or to reimburse the ICC for the costs incurred, as a result of the transfer of call-handling functions.

### Knowledge base

**2.34** Before taking over a department's hotline functions, ICC will develop a knowledge base jointly with it. ICC's knowledge base system is the major source of information for responding to the public. It contains information on a department's services and facilities, rules and procedures, publications and contact data, topical information and assignment guidelines.

### Service Level Agreement

**2.35** ICC and the department concerned sign a Service Level Agreement ("SLA"). The SLA specifies the service levels agreed in respect of:

(a) **communication between ICC and the department** – including the general performance pledge of ICC, the manner of response and timeframes for different types of cases through different channels at different stages of the case;

(b) **management information reports provided to the department** – including the timeframes for ICC to provide statistical reports on the types of service requests;

(c) **data captured for the department** – including the type of data generated from calls received for the department, the data retention duration and the timeframes for providing data requested by the departments; and

(d) **knowledge captured from the department** – including the standard response time for requests from department or ICC to change the knowledge base.

**2.36** The agreed service levels, timeframes and manner of handling vary from department to department. See **Annex 4** for a summary of the action timeframes for interim and final replies for the client departments.

# 3

# *HANDLING of COMPLAINTS*

## ICC'S ROLE

**3.1** According to its website, ICC handles and processes complaints or service requests for the participating departments. Its mission statement further states that ICC provides an effective platform for resolving cross-departmental complaints **(para. 2.3(d))**. The website does not, however, explain how ICC actually handles or processes a complaint or service request. It is also silent on the precise role of ICC as a "platform for resolving cross-departmental complaints".

**3.2** In response to our enquiry, EU defines ICC's role in handling complaints as follows:

(a) to provide a platform for the public to lodge complaints on services of all participating departments;

(b) to refer complaints to the appropriate departments for action;

(c) to monitor departments' response (including case acknowledgement, interim reply and final reply) so that citizens are informed of progress;

(d) to coordinate efforts and responses when a single complaint involves multiple departments; and

(e) to provide directory service for complaints related to services of non-participating departments.

3.3 Day-to-day operation of ICC is handled by a Chief Executive Officer (**Annex 3**). As necessary, a senior management member of EU (a Principal Executive Officer), will participate in monitoring individual complaints (**para. 3.11**). Head of EU holds monthly meetings with ICC management staff to discuss its overall performance and specific operational issues.

## THE PROCESS

3.4 ICC handles complaints with the assistance of a web-based case management computer system and complaint-tracking computer system. The steps are set out below. A diagram demonstrating the complaint-handling process is at **Annex 6.**

### Logging of complaints

3.5 Upon receiving a complaint, the ICC agent will obtain and log case details and contact information into the computer system. While speaking to a complainant, the ICC agent simultaneously types in key words into the computer system, which will accordingly search and retrieve relevant information from the knowledge base and prompt the agent to ask questions to solicit relevant details from the complainant. From our observations, many of ICC's internal communication within ICC and with departments, as well as some complaint cases, are logged in English.

### Referral of complaints

3.6 After securing the relevant information, the agent will refer the case through the computer system to the responsible departmental subject officer in accordance with guidance from the knowledge base (hereafter referred to as "referral")[7].

3.7 In response, the department is required to acknowledge receipt by returning a note to ICC through the computer system.

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[7] *Departmental officers are designated by departments to deal with ICC for specific aspects of work of the department.*

**3.8** A department may, after consideration, refuse to take responsibility for a complaint and request ICC to reassign the case to another department (hereafter referred to as "reassignment"). The department is not required to indicate the appropriate department, although most departments do suggest which department ICC should approach. This referral and reassignment process will continue until the department responsible for handling the complaint (hereafter referred to as "owner of complaint") is found.

**3.9** Under ICC's mode of operation, a complaint is handled by different call agents. Calls are randomly assigned by the computer system to different agents within their specialist groups (**para. 2.23**). Follow-up actions on a complaint are also assigned at random at different times to different ICC agents.

**3.10** The number of referrals and reassignments and the reasons for reassignments during the past four years are set out below.

*Fig. 4 Number of referrals and reassignments*

| | **2004** | **2005** | **2006** | **2007** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Referrals**[8] | 214,025 | 242,422 | 274,558 | 294,453 |
| **Reassignments (% of referral)** | 9,390 (4%) | 11,952 (5%) | 15,594 (6%) | 15,816 (5%) |
| **Reasons (% of reassignment):** | | | | |
| - **location-crucial/ buck-passing** | 6,716 (72%) | 9,116 (76%) | 14,897 (77%) | 12,427 (79%) |
| - **unclear knowledge base/ ICC mistake** | 2,674 (28%) | 2,836 (24%) | 3,734 (24%) | 3,389 (21%) |

Most of the referrals were complaints as all complaints received by ICC entail referral. The major reason for reassignment was that the owner of complaint can be confirmed only after site visit and/or departments could not agree on responsibility.

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[8] *"Referrals" include all call types i.e. enquiry, complaint, suggestion and compliments. ICC does not maintain separate analysis on individual call types but all complaints received by ICC require referral.*

**Monitoring of complaints**

3.11 ICC monitors the progress of complaints at four levels (**Annex** 7).

(a) ***Level 1 monitoring (receipt acknowledgment, interim and final reply).*** If departments fail to acknowledge receipt of complaint or to provide interim or final reply within the timeframe specified in the SLA, the ICC computer system will escalate the case to the departmental supervisory strata to notify the management (hereafter referred to as "escalation notice"). This mechanism applies to all client departments and also to non-client departments, if the complaint is related to one of the three hot topics referred to in **para. 3.25** below.

(b) ***Level 2 monitoring (reassignment).*** If a departmental officer requests, beyond the agreed timeframe, reassignment of complaints, the ICC system will automatically escalate to the departmental officer's supervisor. This currently applies only to seven departments: namely, **TD, HyD, BD, CEDD, EMSD, FEHD** and **LCSD.**

(c) ***Level 3 monitoring (status update).*** This level ensures that ICC agents keep complainants informed of progress and monitor cases repeatedly assigned. When a case is reassigned from one department to another, the ICC system will generate a note to ask call agents to inform complainants of the status. If a case has been reassigned twice, the computer will generate a note to urge ICC agents to clarify ownership of the complaint with departments concerned. This monitoring mechanism applies to ICC agents for cases related to all departments, irrespective of whether they are clients or not.

(d) ***Level 4 monitoring (owner identification)(also known as the 14-day rule).*** Complaints for which no owner can be identified within 7 calendar days after receipt[9] will be

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[9] This arrangement to alert ICC Assistant Manager on the 7th day after receipt of complaint was introduced in November 2007. Before then, ICC Assistant Manager was alerted on the 12th day and would thereafter receive weekly report on the case.

flagged up automatically by the computer system. A daily report will be generated to an ICC Assistant Manager, who will study the case and identify those that require early intervention. On the 12th day after receipt of complaint, an ICC Assistant Manager will send a report to the Departmental Coordinators of the relevant departments[10] to alert them to the case with a view to identifying an owner at the working level. If the relevant departments fail to agree on responsibility within two working days, ICC Assistant Managers are required to escalate the case to a directorate officer of EU, who will negotiate with the Complaint Officers of the departments concerned to determine the responsible parties. This mechanism applies to all departments, client and non-client alike.

Between August 2006 and December 2007, a total of 86 cases were brought to the attention of Departmental Coordinators under this mechanism, with three further escalated to Complaint Officers.

**3.12** Depending on the nature and complexity of the subject areas of individual departments, the agreed timeframes for giving complainants an interim reply range from five calendar days to ten working days, while those for final reply range from ten working days to 80 calendar days (**Annex 4**).

**3.13** In 2007, ICC issued 74,471 escalation notices and 13,443 reminders[11] to urge departments to issue an interim reply according to the agreed timeframes; and 49,919 escalation notices and 4,479 reminders to urge for final reply (**para. 3.11(a)**).

**3.14** Two ICC Assistant Managers, one ICC Supervisor and one Assistant Supervisor are designated for handling complicated cases involving multiple departments.

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[10] *Starting from August 2006, ICC requires each client department to nominate a Departmental Coordinator and a Complaint Officer for liaison, monitoring and escalation purpose. The Departmental Coordinator is pitched at working level while the Complaint Officer is pitched at directorate level* (***para. 3.22(f)***).

[11] *Reminders are issued by ICC to departments* ***before*** *deadlines are due. This arrangement, as agreed with individual departments, is currently applicable to six departments: CEDD, EMSD, HyD, PO, LCSD and TD.*

**Reply to complainants**

**3.15** Interim and final replies to complainants are either given by departments directly or relayed to the complainant through ICC. Departmental subject officers have full discretion in this regard. If the subject officer requests ICC to reply to the complainant, ICC will simply read out, or forward, the reply within one to two working days after receipt of the reply provided by the department. The direct contact number of departmental subject officers is made available to the complainant only upon request.

**Update and analysis**

**3.16** Based on the information provided by departments on individual complaints, ICC will update the knowledge base as necessary. Management reports on the statistics and types of service requests are provided to departments regularly for analysis, management and planning purposes.

## SERVING NON-CLIENT DEPARTMENTS

**3.17** Apart from the 20 client departments, ICC also receives calls regarding departments not subscribing to ICC service, i.e. non-client departments. Currently, except for three hot topics (**para. 3.25**), whenever calls concern non-client departments, ICC will provide their general enquiry hotline number or email address and advise callers to approach the departments concerned directly. If the complainant so requests, ICC will refer the case to the department. Once ICC receives the non-client department's acknowledgement, the case will be closed in the ICC system. In case callers make further complaints or provide more information, ICC will accordingly forward to the departments but will not monitor the outcome of the referral. A comparison of the service rendered by ICC to client departments and non-client departments is at **Annex 8**.

## CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL COMPLAINTS

**3.18** Some complaints involve responsibilities of multiple departments. In 2007, 5% (or 10,545) of the complaints received by ICC involved subject areas that cut across the responsibilities of more than one department.

3.19 The following table demonstrates the multiple responsibilities in some subject areas handled by ICC.

*Fig. 5 Common issues involving multiple departments*

| Common issues handled by ICC | Departments involved |
|---|---|
| Vegetation management | Clients: AFCD, ASD, HyD, LCSD, DSD<br>Non-clients: HAD, Lands D, HD, WSD |
| Slope safety | Clients: AFCD, ASD, BD, CEDD, HyD, LCSD, DSD<br>Non-client: Lands D |
| Illegal waste disposal | Clients: AFCD, CEDD, FEHD, HyD, LCSD, DSD<br>Non-clients: HAD, Lands D, HD, EPD |
| Mosquito | Clients: AFCD, FEHD, HyD, LCSD, MD, DSD<br>Non-clients: HAD, Lands D, HD, WSD, HA |
| Obstruction | Clients: BD, EMSD, FEHD, HyD, LCSD, MD<br>Non-clients: HAD, Lands D, HD, FSD |
| Traffic facilities | Clients: CEDD, HyD, LCSD, TD, DSD<br>Non-clients: HAD, Lands D |
| Illegal parking | Clients: FEHD, TD<br>Non-client: HKPF |

3.20 Problems commonly associated with responsibilities that cut across multiple departments include difficulty in identifying owner departments and grey areas between departments regarding accountability for issue resolution.

3.21 ICC has made continuous efforts to address these problems. Since mid-2006, ICC has been tasked to coordinate among departments to resolve these complaints, as detailed below.

**Service improvement**

***2005 Policy Address***

3.22 The Chief Executive pledged in his 2005 Policy Address to "*strengthen the Integrated Call Centre's capability to respond to citizen complaints regarding Government services and assist bureaux and departments in resolving cross-departmental issues in a more timely and effective manner*". In response, ICC reviewed its complaint-handling procedures in 2006 and devised recommendations to strengthen and improve its service:

(a) ICC to revise the knowledge base jointly with departments to clarify grey areas in respect of 12 cross-departmental complaint issues[12];

(b) client departments to explain to ICC when requesting reassignment of complaints;

(c) client departments to copy to ICC their reply to complainants;

(d) client departments to provide quality interim replies, instead of template replies, to complainants;

(e) ICC to act as a single point of contact for some specific complaint subjects, irrespective of whether client or non-client departments are involved;

(f) client departments to nominate a directorate member for monitoring complaints and for liaison, namely Complaints Officer (**para. 3.11(d)**); and

(g) client departments to appoint, among themselves, a department to lead in resolving complaints on specific matters when responsibility for a particular complaint is unclear.

**3.23** All except one of these recommendations have been implemented in 2006: the proposed appointment of a "lead" department, **item (g)**, was not taken on board.

**3.24** ***Item (g) – The "lead department" approach.*** This approach envisages departments agreeing a "lead" department on specific subject areas. The "lead" department is to take the key role in resolving complaints involving these subject areas if responsibility for a particular complaint is unclear. Client departments were consulted but were not supportive as there were far too many subject areas for consideration and it was difficult to agree an exhaustive list. It was, therefore, not pursued.

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[12] *The 12 issues are vegetation management, refuse and hygiene conditions, obstruction, mosquitos, illegal parking, traffic facilities, slope safety, unauthorised building works, water seepage, road works, road defects and road closure.*

3.25 *Item (e) – The "single point of contact" proposal.* ICC has since August 2006 arranged, as a pilot, with non-client departments concerned for ICC to monitor the entire handling process of three specified hot topics (vegetation management, slope safety and construction and demolition waste), even if only non-client departments are involved in a complaint. Departments normally involved in these hot topics are EPD, WSD, HAD, DSD and Lands D. The first three departments are non-clients, while DSD is a client and Lands D a prospective client. As a single point of contact, ICC will log details of the complaint and refer it to the client and non-client departments involved. After referring the case to the department(s), ICC will monitor the progress through its computer system and as necessary, send reminders and escalation notices. Officers of non-client departments are required to reply to callers directly and inform ICC afterwards for closing of cases.

3.26 *Item (a) – The proposed revision of knowledge base.* As at December 2007, ICC has reviewed and revised the knowledge base of seven cross-departmental complaint issues in consultation with departments concerned.

3.27 *Items (b), (c) and (d).* Although departments agreed to implement these recommendations, they are not obliged to follow them in every complaint received. To gauge compliance with these recommendations, ICC conducted in 2006 a snapshot survey on cases received before and after implementation. Although overall case turnaround time indicated improvement, compliance with **items (b), (c) or (d)** remained the same, even in 2007 (**Annex 9**).

***EU's other improvement attempts***

3.28 EU is aware of ICC's weakness in identifying responsible departments when cross-departmental responsibility is not clear (**para. 3.22(g)**). It has explored several approaches to facilitate efficient and effective determination of ownership for a complaint. The aim is to identify a party to assume responsibility for handling complaints that cut across departmental purviews. However, such proposals were not supported by departments, and nothing resulted from EU's efforts.

3.29 *Citizen Services Response Centre.* In August 2005, EU suggested setting up the Citizen Services Response Centre under the Director of Administration ("D of Adm") to take charge of all cross-departmental complaints as "*one accountable party with power and authority to command, control and make decision*". The suggestion *per se* was not taken up. Instead, the Administration pledged to

strengthen ICC's complaint-handling capability (**para. 3.22**). However, a truly accountable party has yet to be designated with authority to command the handling of complaints involving multiple departments.

**3.30** ***"Department of first contact" approach.*** This expects the complaint-receiving department (in particular the first department to which ICC refers the complaint) to help identify the responsible department and remain as the contact point for the complainant until the case is taken over by the latter department. If the case is outside the jurisdiction of the department of first contact, the action officer should make the referral and clearly inform the complainant as early as possible. All such referrals should be copied to ICC so that ICC will be kept in the loop and can monitor progress according to the agreed timeframe. The proposal was, however, not pursued after a few departments expressed reservations on implications for workload.

**3.31** ***"Home Affairs Department" approach.*** EU explored in 2006 the "HAD" approach whereby cross-departmental complaints from a particular district should become the responsibility of that particular District Office as the local Government representative. This approach was turned down by HAD on the ground that cross-departmental complaints fall outside HAD's policy focus on issues of a political nature.

# 4

# *CASE STUDIES*

## GENERAL

**4.1** Complaints against Government make up about one-tenth of all calls, faxes, emails and letters received by ICC (**Fig. 1 in Chapter 2**). Since its inception in 2001, ICC has dealt with about one million such complaints. During the past seven years, ICC has received over 1,600 complaints against its handling of enquiries and complaints. As at the end of May 2008, our Office has also received 80 complaints against ICC's handling of enquiries and complaints since ICC's inception. Of these 80 cases, 60 were against ICC's complaint-handling, 74 of which have been concluded as at the end of May 2008. Two of them are reported in this chapter (**Cases A** and **D**). The other two cases reported here (**Cases B** and **C**) have been short-listed from a total of 86 complaints against Government, received by ICC between August 2006 and December 2007 and escalated to the level of Departmental Coordinators under the 14-day rule monitoring mechanism (**para. 3.11**).

**4.2** The four cases discussed in this chapter have been chosen to illustrate the systemic areas of concern in ICC's handling of complaints. They supplement the information from our site visits, meetings with ICC and EU and written materials.

## CASE A

### Case History

**4.3** A citizen complained to ICC in March 2006 about four broken and protruding bolts left on a safety island from two traffic bollards removed during earlier public works. The citizen refused to leave his contact details with ICC.

**4.4** ICC immediately called and faxed EMSD to refer the complaint. EMSD replied the following day that, as HyD's contracting party, it could not install new traffic bollards without a work order issued by HyD.

**4.5** For the next nine days, ICC did not take any action. On Day 11, the complainant called ICC. ICC relayed the message to EMSD again, despite EMSD's earlier reply that no work order had been issued. EMSD repeated its reply. No progress was made until Day 15, when the complainant called ICC to urge for expeditious action and ICC relayed the interim prorgess. ICC relayed the message to EMSD for the third time. EMSD gave the same answer.

**4.6** On Day 18, i.e. 16 days after EMSD's initial reply, ICC referred the complaint to HyD. HyD suggested that WSD, which had removed the bollards in the first place, should be responsible for reinstalling. ICC emailed WSD accordingly. On Day 29, ICC received WSD's email stating that the bollards would be installed in collaboration with HyD and EMSD. In the meantime, the remnants of the bollards – the four bolts, were covered with traffic cones to protect pedestrians.

**4.7** On Day 51, 36 days after ICC's last interim reply, the complainant called ICC to check progress. ICC called the various departments involved but none would accept responsibility for action. For the following 90 days, no action was recorded. On Day 143, WSD called HyD to "revive" discussion on the supply of electricity cables to the bollards. After a series of site meetings and discussions among WSD, HyD and EMSD, temporary bollards were installed on Day 198 as a transitional arrangement. Permanent bollards comparable to the original ones were eventually installed on Day 279.

**Issues revealed**

**4.8** The case revealed a number of issues:

(a) ***Repeated delay.*** ICC failed on a number of occasions to make timely referral and reassignment.

(b) ***Lack of follow-through.*** ICC did not further follow up the complaint after the three departments had refused to take up responsibility or liaise with the other departments. The complaint was left in abeyance for more than 90 days until

revived by WSD.

(c) ***Unclear accountability.*** In the absence of an identified owner of the complaint, no party was put to the complainant as accountable for the complaint. ICC had no control over the substantive handling of the complaint.

(d) ***Rigid adherence to guidelines.*** The repeated referral of the complaint to EMSD reveals that ICC agents strictly followed the letter of the referral guidelines without cross-checking the referral history of the case, thereby repeatedly and erroneously referring it to the same party.

**CASE B**

**Case History**

**4.9** The complainant complained to ICC in August 2007 about two traffic signs with loose screws at a transport interchange.

**4.10** ICC referred the complaint to HyD initially by phone in vain and left a voice message. ICC then emailed HyD with the remark that it was "a suspected urgent case with imminent danger". HyD failed to respond to the voice message or acknowledge receipt of the email within two working days, as set out in the SLA with ICC. However, ICC did not escalate the case.

**4.11** On Day 4, HyD emailed to ask ICC to refer the complaint to Arch SD as repair of signs was outside its jurisdiction.

**4.12** On Day 5, ICC referred the complaint to Arch SD, which denied responsibility on the same day. ICC immediately referred the complaint to TD (Engineering Branch) by email. TD did not acknowledge receipt or reply, despite ICC's one reminder and two escalation notices to TD on Day 9, 10 and 12. When TD finally replied, on Day 22 -- 18 days after ICC's referral, it pointed out that another branch of TD, namely Transport Operation Section, was responsible for the repair.

**4.13** On Day 23, ICC referred the complaint to Transport Operation Section and gave the complainant an interim reply. Four days later (Day 27), the Transport Operation Section requested ICC to liaise with Arch SD claiming that it was Arch SD's responsibility.

**4.14** On Day 29, ICC referred the case to Arch SD for the second time. Arch SD reiterated its earlier stance and asked ICC to contact EMSD. EMSD denied responsibility and asked ICC to consult TD.

**4.15** On Day 31, ICC called TD's subject officer in vain. On the same day, ICC Assistant Manager sent an email to both TD and Arch SD.

**4.16** On Day 32, ICC Assistant Manager escalated the case to the Departmental Coordinators of HyD, TD, EMSD and Arch SD to request their assistance in reaching a compromise. Next day, the departments concerned emailed one another to sort out responsibility. The Coordinators of both HyD and EMSD remarked in passing that the loose traffic signs could pose potential danger to the public. That day, 33 days after ICC received the complaint, Arch SD repaired the signs.

**Issues revealed**

**4.17** The case revealed the following issues:

(a) ***Inadequate priority for matters posing imminent danger.*** Although both ICC and the departments had remarked that the matter might pose imminent danger, ICC failed to flag up the complaint for the departments' immediate attention and accord expedient handling.

(b) ***Non-adherence to agreed timeframes.*** Despite Levels 1, 2 and 4 monitoring (**para. 3.11**), for a number of instances, the departments had failed to make timely replies and acknowledgement to ICC or to respond to reminders from ICC. ICC failed to initiate escalation despite the departments' delays and blatant violation of the agreed timeframes. Had ICC Assistant Manager administered the 14-day rule (**para. 3.11**), the case would have been escalated to Departmental

Coordinators ten days earlier and would have resulted in earlier resolution of the complaint.

(c) ***No value-addition by ICC.*** ICC was repeatedly requested by different departments to refer the complaint to another department. It contributed little to the identification of the complaint owner.

(d) ***Intra-departmental communication via ICC.*** ICC was asked by TD Engineering Branch to refer the complaint even though it was just to another section within TD itself.

## CASE C

### Case History

**4.18** The complainant complained in June 2007 to ICC that a section of a mountain road had collapsed and requested remedial action. ICC referred the case to the District Lands Office of Tuen Mun (DLO/TM) instantly to clarify land status and management responsibility.

**4.19** DLO/TM replied on Day 22 that the complaint should be referred to CEDD for slope stability assessment and to the Tuen Mun District Office (TM/DO) of HAD for funding for repair. For five days, ICC made no referral; then on Day 27, ICC referred the case to HAD and CEDD.

**4.20** On Day 35, CEDD replied that there was no slope stability concern and requested referral to WSD. HAD's reply to ICC, which was not received until Day 54, tallied with CEDD's suggestion.

**4.21** ICC informed the complainant of progress on Day 41. Following CEDD's suggestion, ICC referred the complaint to WSD on the same day. WSD replied two days later (Day 43) that the site was maintained by Arch SD.

**4.22** 32 days later, ICC referred the case to Arch SD on Day 75. On the same day, the complainant called ICC to chase for progress. Arch SD replied to ICC on Day 78 and 82 that WSD had maintenance responsibility.

**4.23** On Day 87, ICC referred the complaint to WSD for the second time and wrote to Lands D to check the land status. WSD replied two days later (Day 89) with sketches to prove that Arch SD was responsible.

**4.24** On Day 91, an ICC Assistant Manager escalated the complaint to Departmental Coordinators.

**4.25** WSD wrote to ICC on Day 100 to admit its mistake and undertook to take responsibility.

**4.26** ICC tried to call the complainant on Day 105 but could not reach the complainant.

**Issues revealed**

**4.27** The case revealed the following issues:

(a) ***Repeated delay.*** ICC repeatedly failed to make timely referral to departments, delaying for 11 and 32 days respectively.

(b) ***No value-addition by ICC.*** As in Case B, ICC contributed little to the identification of the complaint owner.

## CASE D

### Case History

**4.28** The fire alarm in a building housing a public library went off one day in June 2007. The complainant, then using the library, complained on the spot to the librarian immediately and requested that library users be evacuated. 15 minutes later, the librarian received confirmation from the Management Office of the building that it had been a false alarm. In this connection, the Management Office made two public announcements subsequently.

**4.29** Later that day, the complainant complained against LCSD via email (enquiries@lcsd.gov.hk) with his views on the need for immediate evacuation, the defective fire system in the building and the long lapse before public announcement on the false alarm. The complainant also asked for a full report on the incident and details of the evacuation plan.

**4.30** On Day 7, six days after receiving the complaint, ICC (which had taken over the handling of emails to LCSD's email address) acknowledged receipt of the complaint and referred it to the public library for action.

**4.31** On Day 11, the public library sent ICC a reply for transmission to the complainant, explaining the circumstances of the incident and a brief line on the action to be taken by library staff in case of fire. ICC forwarded the reply to the complainant on Day 17.

**4.32** Dissatisfied with the reply, the complainant emailed ICC on the same day (Day 17) to request from the Director of LCSD direct a full report and remedial action regarding the defective fire alarm system in the building. Five days later (Day 22), ICC referred the complainant's email to the public library.

**4.33** On Day 25, the library wrote to the complainant further explaining the incident, the follow-up actions taken and the general guidelines on fire escape. Thereafter, the complainant and the public library corresponded with each other direct, without routing through ICC.

**4.34** On Day 26, the complainant wrote to the library asking for review of the contingency plan in case of fire alarm. The library replied on Day 36, detailing the actions to be taken by staff in case of fire.

**Issues revealed**

**4.35** The case revealed the following issues:

(a) ***Repeated delay.*** ICC repeatedly delayed for days before relaying the complaint to the department and in reverse, the department's replies to the complainant. It took six days to refer the first complaint to LCSD, while the agreed timeframe is to do so within 24 hours after receiving a case through email.

During our inquiry on the case, ICC explained that the numerous delays had resulted from case overload during the period.

(b) ***Complainant's preference for direct correspondence.*** In response to the complainant's request, the department corresponded with him direct, resulting in swifter clarification of matters.

## OUR OBSERVATIONS

**4.36** The general issues illustrated in the four cases may be summarised as follows:

- Repeated delays.
- Non-adherence to timeframes.
- Lack of follow-through.
- Unclear accountability.
- Rigid adherence to guidelines.
- Inadequate priority for matters posing imminent danger.
- No value-addition by ICC.
- Indirect communication.

These issues will be discussed in the following chapters.

**4.37** We are fully aware that the cases above also illustrate deficiencies on the part of some departments. However, the focus of this study is on ICC and so we have not digressed to elaborate on those aspects.

# 5

# OBSERVATIONS AND OPINIONS

## OVERALL PERFORMANCE

**5.1** Overall speaking, we commend ICC's performance as a call centre. Its record each year of resolving over 90% of some three million calls at first point of contact (**Figs. 2** and **3** in **Chapter 2**), notwithstanding the increase in call volume, is no mean achievement. The professional manner and service attitude of ICC staff have been recognised by the public (**para. 2.31**), as evidenced by ICC steadily gaining popularity as a centre for citizens to make enquiries with Government (**para. 2.8**). With its comprehensive database and case tracking system, ICC is well placed to be a **truly integrated, one-stop and easy-link** call centre to cover all Government departments, and even public bodies, in terms of enquiries and even simple complaints.

**5.2** Unquestionably, the concept of "a single point of contact" for citizens to communicate with Government is the mark of an open and accountable, responsive and responsible Administration. It is a laudable initiative and a grand plan. However, in embracing complex complaints, it has been over-ambitious. Put bluntly, ICC has bitten off more than it could chew. ICC aims to be a one-stop integrated service for enquiries **and** complaints for a "joined-up Government" (**paras. 2.2-2.3**). In reality, ICC can hardly be said to be "one-stop" or "integrated" even for Government as it carries only one-third of the 58 Government departments and agencies, not to mention the 21 Government-related organisations or public bodies[13]. Meanwhile, ICC is already operating at full capacity and has had to turn down PO's request for extension of service and six others for subscription (**paras. 2.17-2.18**). In

[13] *For the list of departments and organisations, please see the official Government website http://tel.directory.gov.hk/index_ENG..html.*

fact, ICC has admitted that it cannot cover more departments without jeopardising existing service standards.

**5.3** In sum, we set out our observations on four aspects: scope of service, capability, capacity and problems in handling complaints.

## SCOPE OF SERVICE

**5.4** ICC's current scope of service does not accord with its name and is far from achieving its ultimate goal of an **integrated one-stop** service.

**5.5** The nomenclature "ICC" purports to be an integrated and centralised call service for Government as a whole. However, seven years since implementation, ICC provides limited and patchy service, covering only some hot topics. It now serves only 20 departments but has not taken over all the hotline functions even of these departments. For some departments, it provides partial service, covering only some aspects, or a limited number, of a department's hotlines (**Annex 2**). To the majority of Government departments (non-clients), ICC essentially provides only directory service.

**5.6** Despite EU's stated goal to replace ultimately all departmental hotlines with 1823 (**paras. 2.1 and 2.6**), it does not have a concrete plan to achieve it. Its current stance appears ambiguous to us as it recognises some departments' preference for running their own enquiry and complaint hotlines and considers there to be merit in co-existence of 1823 with client departments' hotlines, especially in terms of reducing the training time for agents and waiting time for callers (**para. 2.22**). In this context, EU should re-examine its long-term goal for ICC.

## CAPABILITY

**5.7** There is incongruence between ICC's capability and its accountability. Intrinsically, neither ICC nor EU is vested with the authority to handle substantive issues of complaint. ICC is an agent of its subscribers, providing service on their behalf. Where substantive issues are concerned, ICC relies totally on the knowledge base and individual departments for instructions and guidance. It does not have expertise or authority to command a department to take ownership of a complaint or

to influence a department's substantive response to it. Nor can it take departments to task for deviating from instructions or for failing to adhere to agreed timeframes.

**5.8** Meanwhile EU, which manages and supervises the operation of ICC, is to all intents and purposes a "service" unit and does not have commanding authority over policy bureaux or departments. When EU steps in under the four-tier monitoring mechanism (**para. 3.11**), it can only resort to reason and appeal to the most likely department(s) to take up a complaint. Departments are, however, under no requirement to oblige.

**5.9** The problem is that when no department accepts responsibility for a complaint, ICC becomes the sole *de facto* Government "representative" "accountable" to complainants unless and until a department accepts responsibility. While citizens have legitimate expectations of ICC to pass their complaints aptly to the responsible department, ICC is in reality not much better placed than the average citizen as it is totally dependent on departments for referral instructions. This absence of substantive accountability often leads to delay and inaction in resolving complaints, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

**Delay and inaction**

**5.10** Under current arrangements, ICC is passive (and helpless) and can only pass the buck along from one department to another. As each department to which the complaint is referred finds evidence that the case is outside its jurisdiction, the determination of the responsible department may still be in process after several rounds of inter-departmental referrals through ICC, as in Cases A, B and C in **Chapter 4**. Even though ICC agents painstakingly contact departments repeatedly, it could not add any real value to the process. Regrettably, ICC's conscientious relaying, and repeated toing and froing, of messages can result in significant delays, as evident in all four cases discussed in **Chapter 4**. Long-dragging cases with no apparent owner are often left essentially to the persistence of complainants to pursue their case.

**5.11** A mix of subjects, or involvement of multiple departments in the same matter, is the major reason for reassignment, accounting for 79% (or 12,427) of the reassignments in 2007 (**Fig. 5** in **Chapter 3**). The current heavy reliance on ICC to identify responsible departments is not realistic and is certainly not in the best interest of efficiency or even the convenience of citizens. ICC is not only deemed

ineffective by some complainants for inability to coordinate departmental actions, its efforts are considered by some to hinder efficient resolution.

### Alternative approaches

**5.12** As for negotiation of complaint ownership, we consider departments concerned to be better placed to discuss and determine responsibility. As Case B in **Chapter 4** has demonstrated, the most efficient and effective solution to cross-departmental complaints is often initiated and agreed among the departments themselves (**para. 4.16**). We consider that, instead of successively passing the buck to different departments, ICC should, as soon as responsibility is in doubt, alert all relevant departments in parallel so that they can discuss and establish ownership among themselves.

**5.13** In this light, EU's attempts at exploring alternative, and potentially more effective and efficient, means of identifying owner departments (**paras.3.22(g), 3.24, 3.28 - 3.31**) was well-intended and worthy of objective consideration. It is regrettable that they did not gain support from departments, especially since we understand that the "point of first contact" approach (**para. 3.30**), in particular, has been practised and proven to work among works departments[14]. We consider that since ICC has not been able to effectively facilitate identification and ownership of responsibility that cut across multiple departments, it should escalate complaints to departmental management as soon as possible. If departments still fail to agree on ownership of complaints, ICC should seek EU senior management's intervention to escalate the complaints to the bureaux level for policy decision.

## CAPACITY

### Manpower constraint

**5.14** ICC's manpower situation has been tight and unstable (**paras. 2.20 - 2.21**). Continued manpower shortage has resulted in delay in case-handling, as Case D in **Chapter 4** has demonstrated. It has also contributed to ICC's continued failure

[14] *The Technical Circular (Works) No. 14/2004 of then Environment, Transport and Works Bureau ("ETWB"), which sets out the administrative framework for handling complaints and enquiries that involve more than one department, requires that the first complaint-receiving department to have responsibility to identify a maintenance department, and until then, to stay as the contact point with the complainant.*

during the past four years to answer 80% of calls in 12 seconds as pledged (**para. 2.26**). Meanwhile, due to inability to cater for expansion, it once even induced an existing client to actively consider pulling out (**para. 2.18**).

**5.15** ICC's measures to deal with manpower constraint, namely devising group skill sets (**para. 2.23**) and exploring new technology (**para. 2.22**) have afforded some short-term relief but not the long-term solution for a truly integrated public sector call centre. Outsourcing to the private sector may alleviate some of its problems but it cannot be a panacea. Enhancing ICC's workforce may also help but in lowering the entry requirement for English language (**para. 2.21**), ICC is likely to sacrifice quality for quantity. Furthermore, there is a limit to the extent of public funding for the service.

**5.16** We see the need for a critical review of ICC's current scope of service and *modus-operandi.*

**Additional service**

**5.17** Despite its tight manpower situation, ICC still endeavours to perform duties arguably beyond core functions. This is admirable effort but over-ambitious attempt.

**5.18** In addition to its call centre service, ICC has taken on an extra role of central repository. This is clearly a useful system (**paras. 2.13-2.14**). The comprehensive records should help departments and other parties concerned cross-reference complaints by the click of a key.

**5.19** However, in its present mode, this covers only three departments. It also means extra work for ICC staff and for departmental officers when they have to feed into ICC complaints received directly in the department. In the face of ICC's severe manpower shortage, such a scheme may not justify resource investment, especially if at the expense of its core duties. This has adversely affected effective delivery of its core call-handling service. It has effectively imposed a limit on its capacity for further subscription (**para. 2.17**).

**5.20** However, we consider this expertise of ICC valuable and can be a saleable commodity for promotion among departments with ICC assisting in set-up within the departments themselves.

## OTHER PROBLEMS IN HANDLING COMPLAINTS

**5.21** ICC's existing monitoring mechanism and mode of operation is not conducive to effective monitoring of complaints without owner, especially if involving multiple departments.

### Monitoring mechanism

**5.22** The 14-day monitoring mechanism implemented since 2006 was EU's initiative to reduce delays (**para. 3.11**). However, our study of cases escalated to Departmental Coordinators and/or Departmental Complaints Officers reveals that the mechanism does not significantly reduce the time spent in identifying ownership for complaints.

**5.23** Once ICC makes a referral, a department is assumed to have taken up the complaint unless it returns a definitive rejection. In this context, ICC cannot determine whether the case has been "outstanding 14 days **without responsible department**", until the department responds. It is known that in some cases, the first department for ICC referral may need more than 14 days to complete the site visit or investigation to assess responsibility. When the first department declines responsibility and ICC re-assigns the complaint to a second department, it may already be well after 14 days of receipt of the complaint. In such cases, ICC Assistant Managers usually exercise discretion in postponing escalation until the referral process clearly reaches a deadlock. This approach relies on the judgment and discretion of Assistant Managers and can at best be only an aid to prompt ICC agents to pay special attention to a case. In most cases, the trigger point of escalation is well over 14 days.

**5.24** Nonetheless, in most of the cases studied, we have found that **timely** escalation to Departmental Coordinators would have resolved matters earlier. In this light, we see advantage in speedier escalation.

### Mode of operation and supervision of cases

**5.25** We observe that ICC's current mode of operation taxes individual agents' ability to discern accurately and respond suitably within a short period of time. For complicated complaints with lengthy history and cases of non-emergency nature but in need of urgent attention, agents' reaction is pivotal. However, existing

agent-computer interface and knowledge base are not conducive to call agents' work, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

*Agent-computer interface*

**5.26** As calls may be assigned to different agents within their specialist group, the outcome relies heavily on the ability of individual agents to grasp the status and development of such complaints through review of records on screen (**para. 3.9**). It is not realistic or reasonable to expect agents to assimilate the essence of complaints with lengthy history cases, especially in ICC's working environment, with emphasis on speed and instant response. Case A in **Chapter 4** illustrates this point. It is particularly demanding and difficult if the agent has an irate complainant at the other end of the line.

**5.27** Moreover, the current agent-computer interface relating to development of a case is presented in such a way that agents have to open a series of "windows" on screen to read consecutive actions. This means that it is even harder for agents to follow development of lengthy cases within a short time.

*Cases requiring urgent attention*

**5.28** For non-emergency cases[15] that still need urgent attention[16], such as the loose road signs in Case B in **Chapter 4**, agents are required to flag them up in the call management system and immediately notify ICC Assistant Managers, who will then make a call to the appropriate department for necessary action.

**5.29** However, whether such cases can be promptly brought to departments' attention hinges ultimately on the ability of individual agents and Assistant Managers to identify and interpret the guidelines correctly against the reported situation. In times of high call volume, this demand can be taxing for agents and may be prone to omission, as Case A in **Chapter 4** demonstrates.

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[15] *ICC does not handle emergency calls and there is no direct call transfer arrangements between ICC and HKPF. According to ICC's Call Handling Procedural Manual, ICC call agents are to advise callers of emergencies to dial "999" directly. Emergency calls, according to the Call Handling Procedural Manual, include those alleged to be such by the caller, matters of life-threatening, criminal and rescue-related nature. They also include fire alarm, requests for ambulance service, chemical or gas leakage and oil or chemical spillage.*

[16] *Classification of such cases are made by individual departments and set out, together with any specific treatment required, in the knowledge base.*

*Adherence to timeframes*

**5.30** As demonstrated in all four cases in **Chapter 4**, ICC and departments do not always adhere closely to the timeframes for action at various stages of processing a complaint. Delays may be attributable to individual omission or capacity overload. Delay caused by ICC's capacity problem has been discussed earlier. Currently delay caused by departments will be reflected in ICC monthly management reports to departmental managerial strata for deterrent. To promote adherence by departments, some incentive or award scheme needs to be devised for compliant departments to recognise and encourage adherence.

**Gauging performance and satisfaction**

**5.31** ICC provides client departments with the compliance rate of the general performance pledges applicable to all calls (**para. 2.25**). However, the performance in respect of the specific action standards and timeframes agreed with the departments in the SLA are not systematically gauged. Nor are they included in the monthly management report to departmental management. Consequently, departments and ICC have no idea how ICC or the departments have performed to these finer standards.

**5.32** In the course of our investigation, ICC conducted, on an *ad hoc* basis, a qualitative survey on specific groups of users i.e. citizens who have lodged complaints through ICC (**para. 2.32**). Such specific qualitative surveys should be regularly conducted as their findings provide pointers for improvement.

**Public perception**

**5.33** The way ICC currently publicises, or rather does not publicise, its role in handling complaints is a source of confusion, misconception and false expectations to the public.

**5.34** The extent of "publicity" for ICC or 1823 is mainly through its own website and individual client department's announcement of its service. Although most of ICC client departments indicate in their publicity materials about ICC service for them (**(h) in Annex 1**), perhaps understandably none has set out ICC's exact role in handling complaints. The ICC website merely mentions that ICC "processes" complaints from the public but does not indicate its exact role. Complainants,

therefore, can easily harbour false expectations that ICC may adjudicate and pass judgment on their cases.

### Indirect communication

**5.35** We note that indirect communication is the hallmark of ICC operation – it receives complaints and relays them to and from departments and complainants. However, the gain in administrative convenience and economy of scale may well be at the expense of efficiency and effectiveness.

***Between complainants and departments***

**5.36** The way ICC currently handles complaints on behalf of departments shields the latter from direct contact with complainants upon initial receipt and even further on, as departmental subject officers have full discretion whether to reply directly to complainants or to leave it to ICC to relay their reply (**para. 3.15**).

**5.37** For simple and clear-cut questions and answers, simply forwarding or reading out the department's reply may suffice. However, for more complex matters, especially where the complainant requires clarification of certain points of the reply, repeated relay is cumbersome for ICC and departments, and positively irksome for complainants. Worse still, it may result in defective or deficient delivery and delay, as shown by Case D in **Chapter 4**. This may explain why 1823 has become more popular with people making enquiries than those lodging complaints (**para. 2.8**).

**5.38** We consider that departments should be encouraged to reply to complainants direct: this makes for more personal service and ready clarification where necessary. Subscription to ICC service does not alter the fact that departments are responsible and accountable for the issues under complaint and, therefore, for response and explanation to complainants. While departments may outsource their hotline service, they cannot outsource or abdicate their accountability for services and hence, responsibility for monitoring and following up complaints.

***Between and within departments***

**5.39** In some cases, departments actually communicated with other departments through ICC. In our view, this is inefficient and quite unnecessary, when normally the departments would have communicated with one another direct.

**5.40** As an intermediary between citizens and departments, ICC adds value to Government service as an ever-open front desk. However, as the departmental hotlines are transferred to 1823, it may be said that the public is distanced from departments and contact with them becomes more remote. ICC should recognise that some complainants prefer to discuss their complaints with departmental subject officers directly.

**5.41** In this connection, we consider that citizens should be provided with the contact numbers of departmental subject officers as soon as these become known to ICC to enhance convenience and to improve accountability.

# 6

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## CONCLUSIONS

**6.1** The setting up of ICC was a most commendable plan, executed with missionary zeal and due diligence. ICC aspires to create a central public sector call centre for all and a new benchmark. Indeed, ICC has provided the public with a truly all-time accessible platform where citizens can speak with an agent and have their enquiries answered instantly most of the time. ICC's powerful computer systems have also enabled comprehensive data collection and sharing among action departments. This is an improvement in accessibility, consistency and accuracy of service compared to the previous operation of separate departmental hotlines. Moreover, notwithstanding the high call volume and manpower constraint, ICC has been continuously making earnest efforts to sustain service standards and strive for improvement.

**6.2** The very concept of ICC that aims for a more direct, convenient and customer-friendly hotline service has evidently been achievable with one-off enquiries. Given its computer network and track record of resolving more than 90% of calls at first point of contact and in handling nearly 10,000 calls a day, we consider **ICC to be well placed to be a truly integrated, one-stop and easy-link call centre to cover all Government departments and even public bodies in terms of enquiries and simple complaints.** However, the handling of more complex complaints – especially those with multiple departments – leaves much to be desired. In making this observation, we are conscious that ICC's limitation reflects not so much its ability but the inherent lack of authority to coordinate among government departments in handling issues involving multiple departments.

**6.3** ICC's value in handling complaints lies in its being an all-time access point that transcends departmental boundaries. For the public, this means accessibility and convenience, efficiency and effectiveness. ICC's purpose is defeated and value reduced if it serves only some departments. In this light, ICC has to make a choice. If it is to remain an **"integrated"** service, then it should encompass the entire Government, not just serve some departments. Alternatively, if it decides that, in the face of harsh reality, it can serve only some departments, its limited scope should be openly acknowledged and duly reflected in its name. The current situation, where ICC continues to carry this misnomer and to fall short of its goal of serving all departments, is misleading to the public and unsatisfactory in principle.

**6.4** Meanwhile, until the Administration has decided ICC's scope of service in the long term, it should improve ICC's current operations, especially in handling complaints.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**6.5** In this context, The Ombudsman makes the following recommendations for the Administration's consideration.

### Scope of service (Long-term)

(1) To be true to its vision and to match its name with service, ICC should review its *modus operandi* with a view to providing a truly "integrated" service for a "joined-up Government", as intended and map out its short-term and long-term plans to this end, having regard to its capability and capacity.

If not, ICC should consider revising its name to accord with its limited service and to avoid unrealistic public expectations.

In brief, ICC should redirect its resources to offer a "one-stop service" for public sector directory, general enquiries and simple complaints (**paras. 5.4-5.6**).

**Operational and technical improvements (Short-term)**

***Capability dnd accountability***

(2) To enhance accountability and to enable efficient and effective identification of departments responsible, EU should initiate discussion with bureaux to resolve problems with cross-departmental complaints (**paras. 5.12-5.13**).

(3) To expedite effective resolution of complaints, once a complaint case reveals unclear demarcation of responsibility among departments, ICC should alert at once all departments involved and in parallel ask them to discuss and establish ownership of the complaint among themselves (**paras. 5.12-5.13**).

***Central repository***

(4) Instead of confining itself to a limited central repository service for just a few departments, ICC should extend its techniques and technology to assist departments to set up a comprehensive complaint tracking system as requested (**paras. 5.17-5.20**).

***Enforcement of monitoring mechanism***

(5) ICC should enforce the monitoring mechanism more proactively by escalating promptly any complaint, for which no department would accept responsibility, 14 days after receipt of the complaint (**paras. 5.22-5.24**).

***Agent-computer interface***

(6) To facilitate effective handling and supervision of cases, ICC should review existing agent-computer interface in consultation with its users, namely call agents and their supervisors as well as client departments, to ensure that the interface is simple and readily comprehensible (**paras. 5.26-5.27**).

*Cases requiring urgent attention*

(7) To assist call agents in identification of cases requiring urgent attention, ICC should confer with departments to review the guidelines and procedures for handling such complaints to ensure that the knowledge base provides clear instructions to agents **(paras. 5.28-5.29)**.

(8) To familiarise call agents with situations that require urgent attention, ICC should strengthen training to increase their awareness of such complaints and the guidelines on procedures **(paras. 5.28-5.29)**.

*Adherence to timeframes*

(9) To improve adherence to action timeframes, ICC should provide incentives or awards to client departments for best record for compliance by, say, publishing yearly reports to recognise good performers and promote best practices **(para. 5.30)**.

*Gauging performance and satisfaction*

(10) To monitor the performance of departments and ICC agents in relation to the service level agreements, ICC should gauge the compliance rates of the various timeframes and departmental performance pledges and to provide such data to Heads of Departments for monitoring purpose **(para. 5.31)**.

(11) To improve complaint-handling, ICC should conduct regular and systematic surveys to gauge complainants' satisfaction level **(para. 5.32)**.

(12) To solicit feedback on service from all users of ICC service, ICC should survey the satisfaction level of both client and non-client departments regularly **(para. 5.32)**.

*Promote understanding of ICC's role*

(13) To promote public understanding and prevent unrealistic expectations of ICC's role in handling complaints, ICC should spell out in its website its role and service, procedures and timeframes. Departments should likewise in their own publicity measures clarify their relationship with ICC, as some (e.g. BD) already do (**paras. 5.33-5.34**).

*Direct communication*

(14) For efficient and effective resolution of complaints, departments should be requested to make direct contact with complainants and fellow-departments where complex or multiple issues are concerned (**paras. 5.35-5.38**).

(15) To improve accountability and transparency, ICC should request departments to state the name and contact number of departmental officers in charge of a complaint in both interim and final replies (**para. 5.41**).

**6.6** We believe in the concept of an integrated one-stop call service for public convenience and Government efficiency. However, ICC's present *modus operandi* does not achieve this. Instead, it labours under considerable constraint and raises unrealistic public expectations. Our recommendations aim to help put this commendable service on track to achieve its vision and mission.

# 7

# FINAL REMARKS

## COMMENTS FROM EU

**7.1** We are grateful to the Head of EU for consulting the 20 client departments and indicating her intention to implement all our recommendations, even specifying timeframes for most of them. We have carefully considered her comments and where appropriate, we have incorporated factual points and recent updates into the text.

**7.2** **Annex 10** is a summary of her main points, with an indication of our reaction.

## OMBUDSMAN'S FINAL REMARKS

**7.3** We do not decry, we certainly do not dispute, the merits of an "integrated call centre" as a concept for unity of service and convenience to the public. Clearly a single easily memorable hotline (1823) for enquiries, and even complaints, round-the-clock across the whole spectrum of Government departments is a boon for Hong Kong citizens. Our concern has been, and remains, whether ICC's current mode of operation, scope of service and capacity can truly match (or be said to match) its original intention or ultimate ambition.

**7.4** There may not be any "alternative Government body" to identify or resolve cross-departmental responsibilities. However, experience has shown that for timely and effective resolution of cross-departmental complaints, it is not adequate just for ICC to be "more robust" in handling such complaints. The fundament problem does not lie with ICC. Given ICC as a service centre for client departments, each with specific individual – often statutory – duties, it is difficult for ICC to impose upon them. Realistically, early resolution depends on inter-departmental

cooperation and consensus in the spirit of service for the community. It is cumbersome and time-consuming, possibly ineffectual, for a service agent like ICC to be checking out one department after another. In this connection, ICC could unwittingly become an agent for buck-passing. Nevertheless, ICC can still help departments monitor and guard against their taking excess time in discussing and agreeing on their roles and responsibilities. Moreover, ICC can continue to be the contact point for complainants, say, for checking developments on their case.

**7.5** We note EU's rendition of its name as an indication of its integrating the functions of answering enquiries and complaints, albeit only for some departments, through different modes of reception. However, it is questionable whether the common citizen would view the nomenclature "Integrated Call Centre" or "綜合電話查詢中心" in the same context. Without integrating the service for enquiries and complaints of all Government departments, ICC shall continue to fall short of public expectations and the express objective in its own vision statement. The reasonable citizen will have difficulty realising, far less comprehending, why ICC "integrates" only some and not all departments. More particularly, it is impossible for a citizen to know which departments have been "integrated" and which not. It is, therefore, necessary that EU clarify the role and ultimate goal for ICC after a realistic review of its *modus operandi*. Otherwise, the public may find the ICC nomenclature confusing and its service incomplete. That can, regrettably, remain a source of complaint against ICC itself.

**7.6** On our recommendation that ICC should concentrate on general and directory enquiries and simple complaints, our aim is to relieve ICC capacity for delivery of core duties for which it has proven its value and to facilitate its coverage of Government overall, thus becoming a truly "integrated" call centre, the *bona fide* "綜合電話查詢中心" **and** "政府熱線". However, EU has expressed concern over the difficulty in differentiating simple from complex complaints.

**7.7** For identifying simple complaints, we suggest for consideration those involving a single department and fully satisfying the complainant after one referral to the department for response *via* ICC. If follow-up issues or queries are raised, ICC should return the complaint to the department for further reply direct. Clearly, it is not possible to be entirely cut and dried but this can be a useful guide.

**7.8** Regarding the two cited recent instances of departments seeking ICC assistance in handling general enquiries hotlines, we reiterate that we have no doubt

about ICC's ability in handling general and directory enquiries. We appreciate its efficiency and effectiveness in this respect. We have made our recommendations precisely to capitalise on this clear advantage and track record of ICC.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

**7.9** The Ombudsman thanks the Head of EU and her colleagues for cooperation and assistance throughout this investigation. We look forward to their progress in implementing our recommendations.

**Office of the Ombudsman**
**Ref. OMB/DI/161**
**June 2008**

# ANNEXES

Annex 1
(para. 1.2)

**Status of the recommendations made in the Ombudsman's Investigation Report in 2003 on the Operation of the Integrated Call Centre**

| Recommendations in the Report | Status |
|---|---|
| (a) To facilitate the inclusion and updating of the knowledge base, greater regard should be given to the different requirements of individual client departments. Updating should be prompt and the knowledge base should be kept current. | **Implemented in 2003.** The knowledge base has been updated and kept current through annual updating and as initiated by departments or ICC. |
| (b) To enhance situational awareness and "memory" of the system, consideration should be given to linking the knowledge base to the Geographical Information System (GIS) datamap. | **Reviewed in 2004.** ICC concluded that it was not cost-effective to install the GIS datamap. There is no way of determining whether a complaint received for the same location was in fact the same as those captured in the GIS datamap and the case must therefore be reported to the client department for verification/investigation. Hence the benefits would be minimal. Moreover, the set-up cost of the GIS datamap is huge. |
| (c) To minimise misdirection or mis-assignment of cases and other common errors, systematic monitoring should be introduced and effective measures incorporated into the knowledge base. | **Implemented in 2003.** ICC has been analysing the causes of case mis-assignment on a monthly basis, and taking appropriate remedial actions (including coaching, training, updating of assignment guidelines, etc) immediately. ICC further enhanced the knowledge base for certain subjects related to cross departmental complaint issues in 2006. |
| (d) To ensure cases are followed up properly, ICC should promptly forward to client departments, monitor progress and remind them in time, but not prematurely. | **Implemented in 2003.** A case tracking system has been installed since August 2002 to monitor case progress and send timely reminder to subject officers. ICC has also revised the case referral procedures in July 2003 so as to minimise pre-mature escalation of cases. In 2004, a web-based case management system was developed to enable access to case details through the Internet. |

| | |
|---|---|
| (e) To improve operational effectiveness and efficiency, EU's annual review of the knowledge base should also examine procedural and staffing approaches to technological problems, not just focus on upgrading the technology. | **Reviewed and implemented in 2003.** The knowledge base is updated annually by ICC and departmental staff to review overall sufficiency and accuracy of information and also the organisation of the information in order to facilitate call handling by agents. |
| (f) To better understand and serve clients, call agents and supervisors should be reconstituted into specialist teams, each responsible for a particular department or functional area (i.e. group of related departments). There should also be designated team for handling and co-ordinating cases which are complicated or cut across the services of more than one department. | **Reviewed and partially implemented in 2003.** ICC has set up a specialised case assignment team and strengthened its backend team's handling and coordinating of cases which are complicated and cannot be resolved at first time of call. |
| (g) To improve staff performance, work should be redesigned ergonomically to recognise their limitations. The aim should be to tailor the system to take into account the limitations of, and provide support to, the staff. Client departments should brief ICC staff from time to time to enhance their knowledge of Government and departmental operations. | **Implemented in 2003.** ICC staff has been provided with:<br>(a) lockers and common room facilities;<br>(b) monthly tea meetings, team meetings, bi-monthly lunch gatherings and voluntary individual interviews with management staff;<br>(c) ICC Staff Motivation Scheme; and<br>(d) briefings by departmental staff on major departmental initiatives and measures. |
| (h) In the interest of transparency and accountability, ICC should answer calls in its own name. Departmental letterhead, publicity material and entries in the Government telephone directory should indicate that calls are handled by ICC on agency basis. However, such publicity should not be undertaken until a decision is reached on whether and how departmental hotlines should be identified. | **Partially implemented.** Calls handled for all client departments, except the Post Office and Student Financial Assistant Agency, are answered in ICC's own name. |

| | |
|---|---|
| (i) To ensure clarity and accountability to callers, ICC should shed anonymity, particularly if it is to continue to use the departmental hotlines. | **Partially implemented in end 2004** to all participating departments, except the Post Office and Student Financial Assistant Agency. |
| (j) To improve accountability to client departments, ICC should regularly provide them with statistics on the number of complaints received about its service. | **Implemented in 2003.** Statistics on complaints and compliments on ICC service are provided to departments on a monthly basis. |
| (k) To remove public concern over breach of personal data privacy, ICC should identify itself to callers and obtain their consent before passing personal data to client departments or third parties for further action. | **Implemented in 2004.** |
| (l) To make for a one-stop service in practice and in name, the long-term solution is to migrate to a single hotline number, say, 1823 Citizen' Easy Link. | **Being reviewed.** It remains ICC's ultimate objective to adopt the single number "1823" to receive telephone enquiries and complaints. ICC has explored a group skill approach and the Automatic Speech Recognition technology to help assess the move towards a single number hotline. However, ICC continues to be constrained in manpower, training and department's preference for retaining their own hotlines. |
| (m) To minimise misdirection or mis-assignment arising from calls to a single hotline, there should be operators for initial screening of calls for forwarding to the appropriate specialist team. | **Implemented in 2003.** A specialised case assignment team has been set up. |
| (n) EU together with the Steering Committee should regularly review and as appropriate revise call-handling needs of departments (with the assistance of outside consultants, as necessary). | **Already the practice.** EU has regular liaison with departments on their call handling needs. |

| | |
|---|---|
| (o) The possibility should not be ruled out that some departments might be better served by departmental call centres. | **Recommendation accepted.** |
| (p) To improve internal working relationship, management-staff issues should be reviewed. | **Already the practice.** ICC has been regularly reviewing staff and management issues with an aim to improving the working relationship between management and call agent staff. |
| (q) To improve working relationship with client departments, the liaison groups should strengthen their dialogue for better mutual understanding and co-operation. | **Already the practice.** ICC regularly communicates with departments through liaison meeting, day-to-day working contact with subject officers on individual cases and meetings at management level. |
| (r) EU should in conjunction with client departments (and outside consultants as necessary determine ICC's service role, review ICC's management culture and arrange appropriate training for management staff. | **Already the practice.** ICC maintains close liaison with departments to review their call handling needs and ICC's role and on ways to improve our service offerings. Training has been provided to management staff. |

**Annex 2**
**(paras. 1.3, 2.6, 2.12, 5.5)**

## Hotlines, Email Addresses and Fax Numbers Handled by ICC

| Year of participation | Department | Hotlines / email / fax | Nos / Address | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2001 | FEHD | Complaint | 1. 2923 5050 | |
| | | Departmental Hotline (IVRS) | 2. 2868 0000 | |
| | | Email (General) | 3. enquiries@fehd.gov.hk | |
| | | Email (Clean HK) | 4. cleanhongkong@fehd.gov.hk | |
| 2001 | TD | Departmental Hotline (IVRS) | 5. 2804 2600 | |
| | | Fax - Urban Regional Office (HK)<br>Fax - Urban Regional Office (Kln)<br>Fax - NT Regional Office<br>TD Headquarters | 6. 2824 0399<br>7. 2397 8046<br>8. 2381 3799<br>9. 2824 0433 | Redirected manually by respective sections of department (as central repository) |
| | | Email | 10. tdenq@td.gov.hk | |
| 2001 | BD | General Enquiry & Complaint Hotline | 11. 2626 1616 | |
| | | Complaint Hotline Against Unauthorised Building Works (IVRS) | 12. 2626 1313 | |
| | | Building Safety | 13. 2626 1234 | |
| | | Building Safety Loan Scheme | 14. 2626 1579 | |
| | | Existing Building HK | 15. 2626 1642 | |
| | | Existing Building Kln | 16. 2626 1257 | |
| | | Existing Building NT | 17. 2626 1270 | |
| | | Fire Safety | 18. 2135 2416 | |
| | | Licensing | 19. 2626 1085 | |
| | | New Building HK | 20. 2626 1382 | |
| | | New Building Kln | 21. 2626 1551 | |
| | | New Building NT | 22. 2626 1482 | |
| | | Port and Airport Development & Rail | 23. 2626 1566 | |
| | | Site Monitoring | 24. 2626 1700 | |
| | | Slope Safety | 25. 2135 2525 | |
| 2001 | HyD | Departmental Hotline | 26. 2926 4111 | |
| | | Headquarter | 27. 2714 1111 | |
| | | Urban Region | 28. 2923 7777 | |
| | | Urban (Kowloon) Region | 29. 2927 4444 | |
| | | NT Region | 30. 2926 4222 | |
| | | Lighting Division | 31. 2388 9765 | |

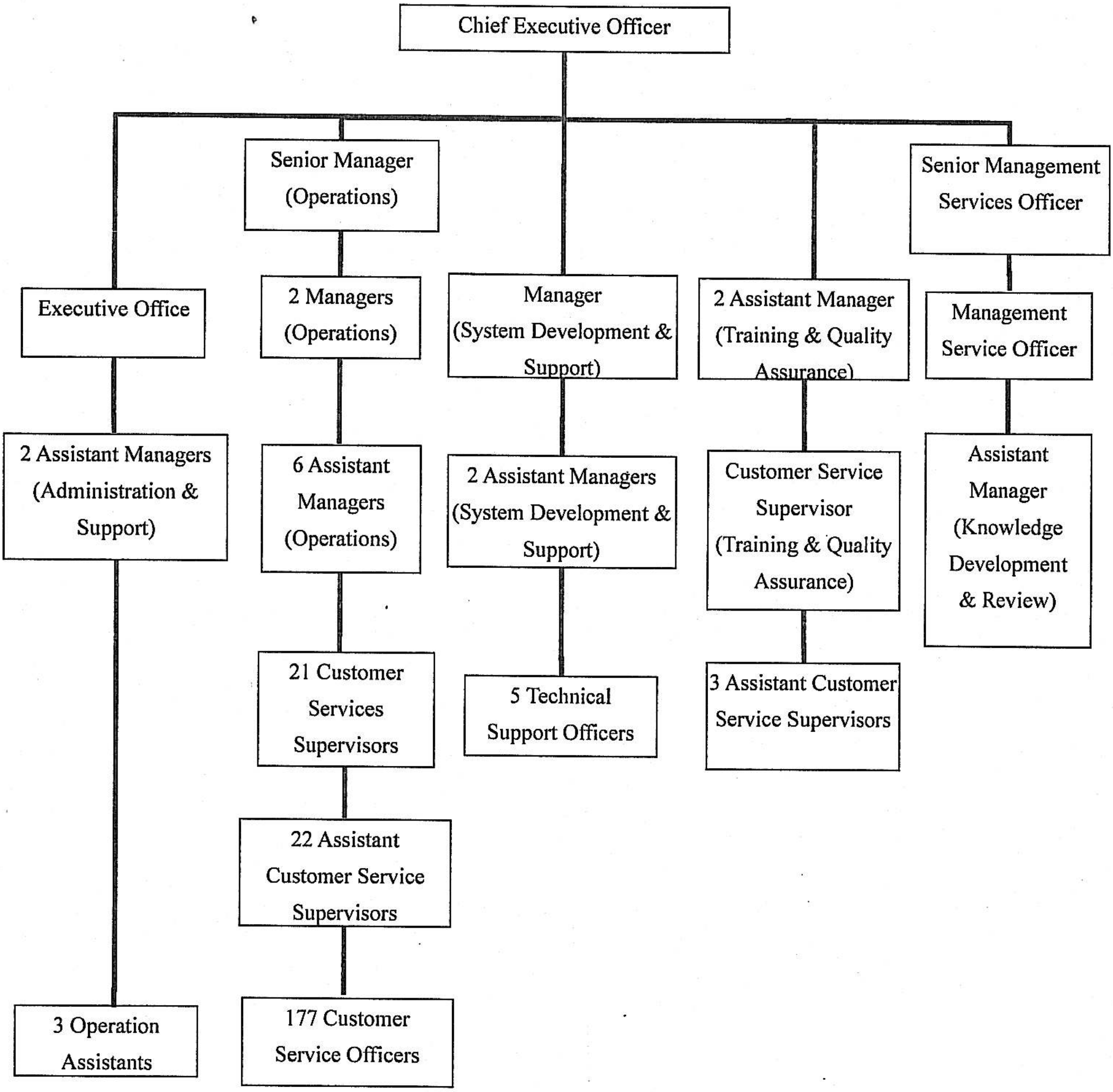
| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Lighting Division | 32. 8102 6686 | |
| | | Bridge & Structure Division | 33. 2495 1155 | |
| | | Email (enquiry) | 34. enquiry@hyd.gov.hk | |
| | | Email (complaint) | 35. complaint@hyd.gov.hk | |
| | | Fax (Headquarters, Public Relations Unit and all other sections, units, regions) | 36. 2714 5216<br>37. 2187 2243<br>38-67. and around 30 fax nos to individual units, sections, regions | Redirected manually by respective sections of department to ICC (as central repository) |
| 2001 | EMSD | General Enquiry | 68. 2882 8011 | |
| 2002 | LCSD | Customer Service | 69. 2414 5555 | |
| | | Departmental Hotline (IVRS) | 70. 2603 4567 | |
| | | Hong Kong Public Library Hotline | 71. 2921 0208 | |
| | | Hong Kong Central Library Hotline | 72. 3150 1234 | |
| | | Email | 73. enquiries@lcsd.gov.hk | |
| 2002 | EPD | (withdrawn) | - | - |
| 2002 | MD | General Enquiry | 74. 2815 0908 | |
| | | General Enquiry (IVRS) | 75. 2542 3711 | |
| 2002 | AFCD | Departmental Hotline (Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS)) | 76. 2708 8885 | |
| | | Animal Management Centre | 77. 2362 3257 | |
| 2002 | CEDD | Slope Safety | 78. 2885 5888<br>79. 2762 5165 | |
| 2002 | RVD | General Enquiry | 80. 2152 0111 | |
| | | General Enquiry (IVRS) | 81. 2152 2152 | |
| 2002 | SFAA | General Enquiry (IVRS) | 82. 2802 2345 | |
| | | Continuing Education Fund | 83. 3142 2277 | |
| 2002 | Post Office | General (IVRS) | 84. 2921 2222 | Covers some, not all, branch offices |
| 2003 | Arch SD | Departmental Hotline | 85. 2867 3628 | |
| 2004 | LD | General Enquiry | 86. 2717 1771 | Outside normal office hours only to ICC |
| 2005 | CR | Departmental Hotline (IVRS) | 87. 2234 9933 | |
| | | General | 88. 2867 2600<br>89. 2867 2604 | |
| | | Registration of documents | 90. 2867 4582<br>91. 2867 4579<br>92. 2867 4581 | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 93. 2867 4580<br>94. 2867 4584 | |
| | | Company Search | 95. 2867 2584 | |
| | | | 96. 2867 2571 | |
| 2006 | OGCIO | GovHK Enquiry Hotline | 97. 183 5500 | |
| | | Email | 98. enquiry@1835500.gov.hk | |
| 2007 | TCO / DH | Enquiry & Complaint Hotline | 99. 2961 8823 | |
| 2007 | LR | General Enquiry (IVRS) | 100. 3150 0000 | |
| 2007 | DSD | Drainage Complaint Hotline | 101. 2300 1110 | Overflown calls only |
| 2008 | SWD | General Enquiry on Social Security Matter for SWD Hotline | 102. 2343 2255 | |
| - | HAB | Equestrian Hotline | 103. 2107 9955 | Ad Hoc Project* |
| | | Recruitment of Volunteers for the Beijing Olympic & Paralympic Games | 104. 2591 6690 | Ad Hoc Project* |

***Footnote (*)*** *ICC assists departments and bureaux on a project basis by answering enquiry hotlines of ad hoc public campaigns.*

**Annex 3**
**(paras. 2.19, 3.3)**

## ICC Organisation (as at 14 May 2008)



**Annex 4**
**(paras. 2.27, 2.36 and 3.12)**

**Agreed Timeframes for Interim and Final Reply**

| Department | Enquiry | | Complaint | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Interim Reply | Final Reply | Interim Reply | Final Reply |
| AFCD | 2 working days | 2 working days | 10 calendar days | 30 calendar days |
| ASD | 2 working days | 2 working days | 10 working days | 18 working days |
| BD | 10 working days | 80 calendar days | 10 working days | 80 calendar days |
| CEDD | 10 working days | 28 working days | 10 calendar days | 21 calendar days |
| DH (TCO) | 10 working days | 90 calendar days | 3 working days | 90 calendar days |
| DSD | 10 calendar days | 10 calendar days or 14 calendar days after interim reply | 10 calendar days | 10 calendar days or 14 calendar days after interim reply |
| E&MSD | 10 working days | 14 working days | 10 working days | 14 working days |
| FEHD | 9 calendar days | 9 calendar days | 10 calendar days | 21 calendar days |
| HyD | 7 working days | 7 working days | 7 working days | 21 working days |
| Post Office | 10 working days | 10 working days | 10 working days | 10 working days |
| LCSD | 10 calendar days | 42 calendar days | 10 calendar days | 42 calendar days |
| LD | 2 working days | 2 working days | 10 calendar days | 60 calendar days |
| MD | 1 working day | 1 working day | 10 working days | 28 calendar days |
| RVD | 3 working days | 3 working days | 10 working days | 10 working days |
| TD | 10 working days | 21 working days | 10 working days | 21 working days |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| OGCIO | 10 working days | 21 calendar days | 10 working days | 21 calendar days |
| CR | 4 working days | 4 working days | 10 working days | 10 working days |
| SFAA | 10 calendar days | 21 calendar days | 10 calendar days | 21 calendar days |
| LR | 1 working day | 10 calendar days | 4 working days | 21 calendar days |
| SWD | SWD does not provide interim reply | 10 working days | SWD does not provide interim reply | 10 working days |

Annex 5

(para. 2.31)

**Summary of the Results* of ICC's External Customer Satisfaction Survey (Yearly Average)**

| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q1. Waiting time** | 4.06 | 3.99 | 4.12 | 4.06 |
| **Q2. Manner/ attitude** | 4.39 | 4.41 | 4.46 | 4.46 |
| **Q3. Understanding** | 4.16 | 4.21 | 4.29 | 4.27 |
| **Q4. Information provided** | 4.2 | 4.25 | 4.32 | 4.30 |
| **Q5. Answer to enquiry** | 3.91 | 3.98 | 4.05 | 4.06 |
| **Q6. Overall service** | 4.13 | 4.13 | 4.22 | 4.08 |
| **Total** | 4.15 | 4.16 | 4.24 | 4.16 |

*(Note: Citizens calling ICC are invited to take the survey and rate, on an ascending scale from zero to five, their satisfaction with aspects of ICC service. The exact questions are as follows:*

*Q1. Are you satisfied with the waiting time required to connect your call to our Customer Service Officer?*

*Q2. Are you satisfied with the manner and attitude of our Customer Service Officer?*

*Q3. Do you think our Customer Service Officer is able to understand your need?*

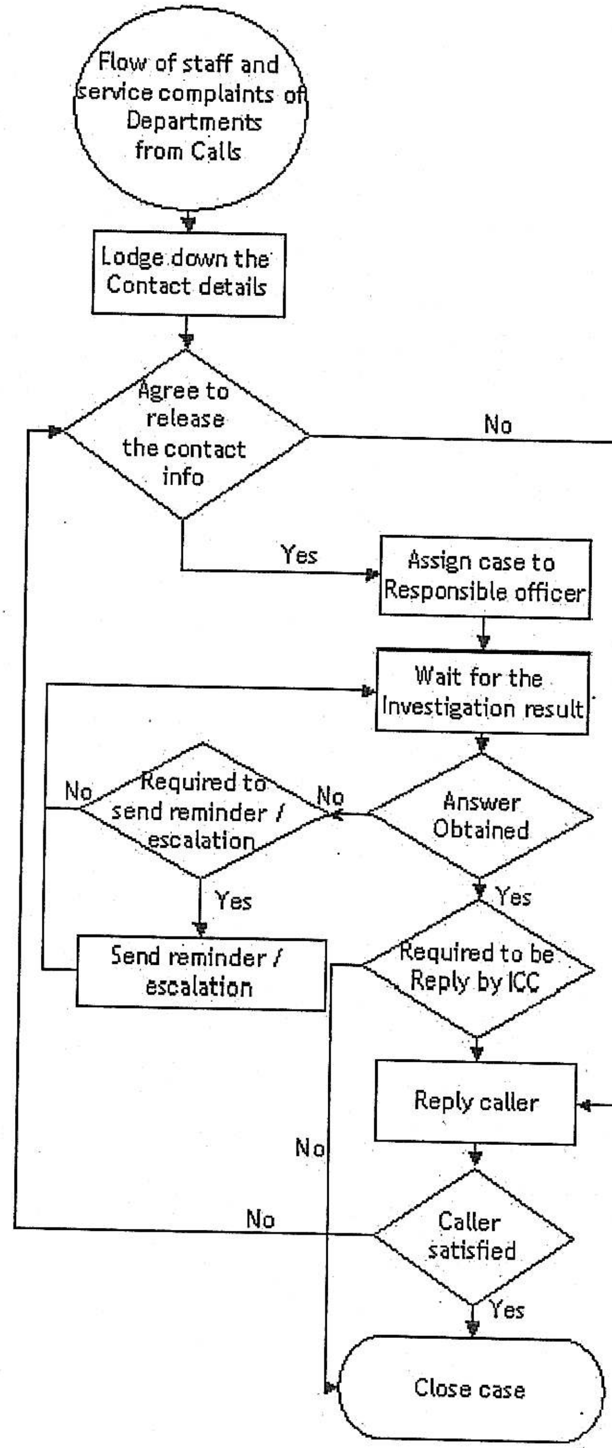
*Q4. Do you think the information provided to you by our Customer Service Officer is clear and easy to understand?*

*Q5. Do you think the information provided to you by our Customer Service Officer is adequate?*

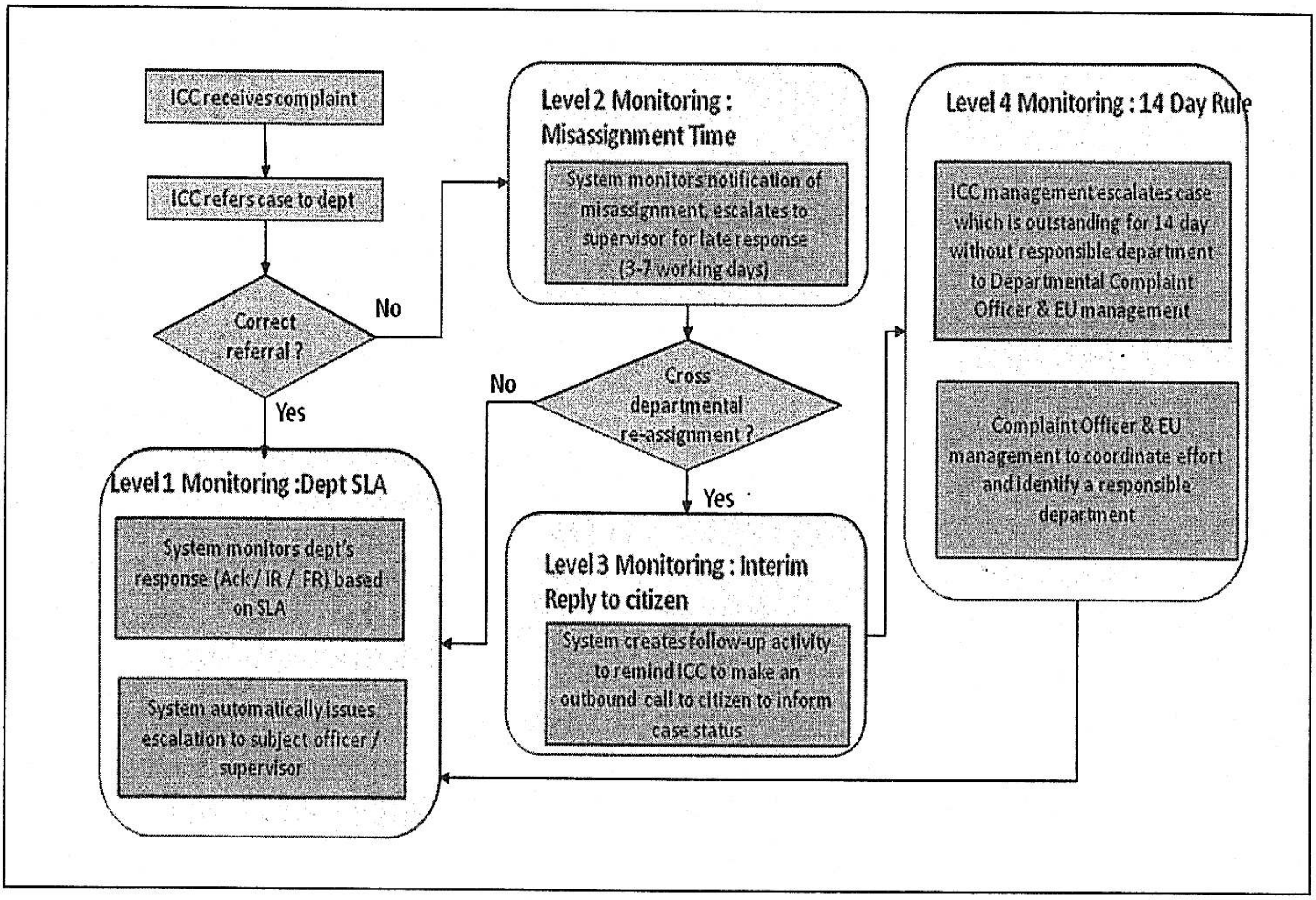
*Q6. Are you satisfied with the service of this enquiry hotline?)*

**Annex 6**
**(para. 3.4)**

## Complaint-handling flow diagram



# ICC's 4-Tier Monitoring Mechanism for Complaint-Handling



**Annex 8**
**(para. 3.17)**

## Comparison of service provided by ICC to client departments and non-client departments

| Service provided by ICC | Clients | Non-Clients | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-hot topics* | Hot topics* |
| receive enquiries/ complaints | √ | √ | √ |
| within-knowledge base reply | √ | | |
| log complaint details | √ | √ # | √ |
| refer complaint to department | √ | √ # | √ |
| monitor - | | | |
| send reminders | √ | | √ |
| escalate | √ | | √ |
| relay replies to callers | √ | | |
| coordinate actions and responses | √ | | √ |

* *The three hot topic are vegetation management, slope safety and construction and demolition waste. Non-clients involved in these hot topics are EPD, HAD, HD, LandsD and WSD (para. 3.25).*

# *only upon complainant's insistence*

**Annex 9**
**(para. 3.27)**

**Results of ICC's snapshot survey on the recommendations in ICC's 2006 review**
*(Based on around 100 random samples from cases completed in the month)*

**Case turnaround time (time between opening and closing of case)**

| | **7 days** | **8-14 days** | **15-30 days** | **Over 30 days** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **16 July – 15 August 2005** | 42% | 22% | 15% | 21% |
| **16 July – 15 August 2006** | 51% | 21% | 15% | 13% |

**Compliance rate of items (b), (c) and (d) of the recommendations* (para. 3.22)**

| | **1st snapshot - June 2006 (immediately after implementation)** | **2nd snapshot - August 2006 (one month after implementation)** | **2007**** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Provide reasons for reassignments (Item (b))** | 83% | 76% | 94% |
| **Provide ICC with substantive replies (Item (c))** | 44% | 47% | 78% |
| **Provide quality interim replies (Item (d))** | 43% | 31% | 45% |

*Note:*

* *The three recommendations were implemented on 1 July 2006.*

** *2007 figures based on 100 random samples in August 2007.*

**Annex 10**
**(para.7.2)**

## EU's comments on the Draft Report and our views

| Paragraph | Issues | EU's comments | Our Views |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2.18 | PO branch office enquiry hotlines | Although ICC is currently not capable of taking over the hotline service of the remaining PO branch offices, EU has confirmed with PO that they do not have the intention to drop out of ICC and set up its own centralised call centre. Their existing plan is to outsource the hotline service for these remaining branch offices as a temporary arrangement. If the capability of ICC in taking up more departments can be increased, they intend to request ICC to take up these branch offices' enquiry service in the long run. The Ombudsman should therefore consider taking out the paragraph. | Para.2.18 suitably adjusted. |
| 4.19-4.27 | Case C | As for the observations in paragraph 4.27(c) that ICC should obtain alternative means of contact from complainants, apart from calling complainants directly, ICC is now also making use of Short Message Service (SMS) for providing case replies to complainants. When ICC tries to contact a complainant for a case status update but the complainant is not available for immediate conversation, ICC may send the case status to the complainant's mobile phone by means of an SMS, so that the complainant can choose to read the answer at his convenience. | Noted. |
| 5.11 | Reliance on ICC to coordinate departmental actions | While EU agrees there is still room for improvement in ICC's operation regarding the handling of cross-departmental complaints, she considers there is genuine public need for ICC to continue to perform its existing function, i.e. to respond to citizens' complaints and identify responsible party to resolve cross-departmental | The reference to PO in para.5.2 is relevant because ICC is still unable to take up PO's 109 remaining branch offices. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | issues in a timely and effective manner. So far, there is not an alternative Government body that a citizen can turn to for performing such role. Much as EU would like the delineation of responsibilities among departments to be as clear cut as possible, in reality grey areas do exist and perhaps ICC should be more robust with its approach in handling cross-departmental complaints. | |
| 5.14 | Manpower constraint | Same as paragraph 2.18 above, The Ombudsman should consider removing the last sentence about PO. | Para.5.14 suitably adjusted. |
| 6.5(1) | <u>Recommendation 1</u> (*Review ICC's modus operandi*) | <u>Short term</u><br>EU considers the name "Integrated Call Centre" an appropriate description of its functions, as ICC is now providing integrated service covering the handling of enquiries, complaints and suggestions for its 20 client departments. It is also integrated in the sense that citizens may select to contact ICC either by phone, email, fax or online form. If a case originally related to one client departments is later found to "belong" to another, ICC is responsible for referring the case to the correct subject officer and monitoring the case progress, as well as coordinating actions and responses of different departments, until the case is satisfactorily resolved.<br><br>On the other hand, ICC from time to time receives complaints about its name "Citizen's Easy Ling (政府熱線)". The complainants are not satisfied that ICC only covers 20 departments and request that ICC should extend its service to cover the whole government. EU agrees the name "政府熱線" is misleading to a certain extent and has created unrealistic public expectations on ICC. So instead of having two different names | See para.7.5. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | "Integrated Call Centre" and "Citizen's Easy Link", EU will standardise ICC's name to "Integrated Call Centre" (綜合電話查詢中心) in our daily contact with the public. EU will arrange in ICC's website to more clearly spell out ICC's role and service in this regard. To allow time for EU to amend all the publicity materials, EU expects to effect this change in 3 months' time.<br><br><u>Long term</u><br>EU has been actively exploring the most suitable long term operation model of ICC, and outsourcing is just one of the many possible options. However, there are a few major issues, e.g. funding model and market players' readiness to take on this complex service have to be resolved before EU can come up with the clear way forward. EU will keep The Ombudsman informed of the development in due course. The first update would probably be in early 2009.<br><br>EU notes The Ombudsman's recommendation that ICC should only offer service for public sector directory, general enquiries and simple complaints. Not that EU disagrees with the recommendation as such, she considers it difficult both for ICC and/or a complainant to define what are simple complaints at the outset. EU note the observation at paragraph 6.2 that ICC cannot handle more complex complaints due to its inherent weakness in coordination among government departments. Instead of recommending ICC to "give up" its role in handling complex complaints, would it not be better if EU is urged to improve ICC's value-addedness (*sic*) in the process? | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6.5(2) | Recommendation 2<br>(*Initiate discussion with bureaux for resolving problems involving cross-departmental complaints*) | Recommendation agreed. As a matter of fact, EU has all along been making substantial efforts in engaging departments and bureaux for clarifying grey areas related to cross-departmental complaints.<br><br>A successful example is on the subject of Construction & Demolition Waste, in which ICC took the initiative to consult the Department of Justice (D of J) on the interpretation of respective Ordinances. Upon D of J's advice, agreement was reached among departments and a new assignment guideline was put in place.<br><br>Another example is about the regular maintenance of seawalls in typhoon shelters. Last year, ICC received a complaint against the bad smell at Causeway Bay Typhoon Shelter. The case was referred among departments in a loop and was escalated to EU management under the 14-day rule. Finally CEDD undertook to clean up the seawalls as a one-off action. EU has also subsequently followed up with the Bureau to explore a longer term solution.<br><br>EU will continue with the practice in future. | Noted. |
| 6.5(3) | Recommendation 3<br>(*Alert all departments once a case reveals unclear demarcation of responsibility*) | Recommendation agreed. EU will review ICC's existing operation procedure regarding case escalation and study how ICC system can assist its CSOs and management staff to perform the task. As a first attempt ICC will select five subject areas that attract most complaints. A pilot will be carried out in 3 months' time. | Noted. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6.5(4) | Recommendation 4 (*Extend the central repository service to other departments*) | Recommendation agreed in principle. Departments have to redesign its internal workflow and procedures. EU will respond positively to departments' request and share her experience on how to set up a comprehensive complaint tracking system. EU plans to introduce our system to client departments in three months' time. | Noted. |
| 6.5(5) | Recommendation 5 (*Proactive enforcement of case monitoring mechanism*) | Recommendation agreed. With the implementation of the 4-tier case monitoring mechanism for nearly 2 years, EU has developed some experience on complaint case monitoring and has made some adjustments to the mechanism. In the level 4 monitoring, apart from escalating the problematic cases to Departmental Coordinators and Complaint Officers on the 12th day and 14th day after case receipt, EU has also inserted one more threshold before these two existing dates for more proactive case monitoring. For all complaints for which no owner can be identified over 7 calendar days, ICC system will generate a daily report to draw the attention of its responsible Assistant Mangers. They will study the cases and identify those that require early intervention. This 7-day rule was put in place since November 2007 and has proved to be a useful step in further reducing the case turnaround time and resolving difficult cases at an earlier stage. | Para.3.11 suitably adjusted. |
| 6.5(6) | Recommendation 6 (*Agent-computer interface*) | Recommendation agreed. Given that ICC is now carrying out upgrades for its various systems, EU will explore to incorporate this recommendation as an additional system enhancement item. ICC will consult its users, and seek to implement improvement measures in six months' time. | Noted. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6.5(7)&(8) | <u>Recommendations 7 & 8</u><br>(*Cases requiring urgent attention*) | Agreed. ICC will confer with its client departments to review the guidelines and procedures for handling urgent cases. ICC will also arrange refresher courses for its call agents to raise their awareness and to deepen their understanding on the handling procedures of urgent cases. The review will be carried out in 3 months' time. | Noted. |
| 6.5(9) | <u>Recommendation 9</u><br>(*Adherence to timeframes*) | Agreed. Plans are now in hand to conduct a "Complaint Handling Seminar" with ICC's participating departments in 2008. The importance of adherence to action timeframes will be a key item in the seminar. Departmental representatives will also be invited to share their best practices during the function. The seminar will be held in August/September 2008. | Noted. |
| 6.5(10) | <u>Recommendation 10</u><br>(*Gauge the compliance rates of departments and provide such data to Heads of Department*) | Agreed. ICC will conduct systematic measurement on various action standards specified in the SLA, and include in its monthly reports to client departments the compliance rates of departmental officers regarding the handling of complaints. The monthly reports will be sent to departmental coordinators for them to draw the attention of their Heads of Department, and copied to the EU management. The recommendation will be implemented in 3 months' time | Noted. |
| 6.5(11) | <u>Recommendation 11</u><br>(*Conduct regular and systematic surveys on complainants' satisfaction level*) | Agreed. In order to collect public's feedback on a more objective basis, EU is now conducting a tendering exercise to hire an external consultant for conducting monthly external surveys on complaint handling for ICC. It is expected that the first round of survey will start in August/September this year. | Noted. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6.5(12) | <u>Recommendation 12</u><br>*(Survey the satisfaction level of both client and non-client departments)* | Agreed. In fact EU has been maintaining close communication with departments. Apart from the liaison meetings, its staff has regular and frequent contact with the subject officers at the working level to discuss and exchange views on ICC operation. In order to be more systematic with its feedback collection, ICC will conduct annual surveys on its client departments. The first survey will be conducted towards end 2008/early 2009.<br><br>EU will consider what satisfaction surveys on non-client departments ICC can conduct at a later stage. | Noted. |
| 6.5(13) | <u>Recommendation 13</u><br>(*Promote understanding of ICC's role*) | Agreed. ICC will redesign its website and publicity materials to more clearly spell out its role and procedures. Likewise, ICC will request its client departments to do the same in their departmental homepages. Similar to Recommendation 1 on amending its publicity materials, ICC expects to implement the changes in 3 months' time. | Noted. |
| 6.5(14)&(15) | <u>Recommendations 14 &15</u><br>(*Departments to directly communicate with complainants and fellow-department s*) | Agreed. ICC will discuss with its client departments and request them to reply to complainants direct, and to communicate with fellow-departments where complex or multiple issues are concerned.<br><br>To improve accountability and transparency, ICC will request departments to provide the name and contact number of subject officers for all the cases, regardless of whether it is a complaint or an enquiry.<br><br>These two recommendations will be implemented as soon as possible. | Noted. |